

To: Students' Council

Re: Report to Council

Hey Council,

Before I proceed with my report, I would like to acknowledge that our university and our Students' Union are on Indigenous land. Specifically: Cree, Saulteaux, Metis, Blackfoot, and Nakota Sioux.

They are faculty, staff, students, family, and friends, and they are still here. I acknowledge that we meet on treaty 6 territory. That treaty governs the relationship between first-nations and non-first nations citizens. I am thankful for this opportunity for us to meet on this land today. This statement will be included at the front of my report to council until either the time that my term ends, or Council moves to makes a similar statement available for public viewing.

Hope everyone had a restful holiday break! I certainly did, and am looking forward to getting back into the swing of things in Council and on the Board. I attended to important meetings since my last report: the December 12th Holiday Dinner at Lister Centre, and the December 13th meeting of the Board. I'll discuss both in this report.

Holiday Dinner

The dinner was a good opportunity to meet with other members of the board in a more casual environment. It was also a good opportunity to gauge members' opinions on the upcoming tuition and fee proposals. Some members expressed reservations with the proposals, while others were generally in favour. Overall, I got the impression that most members were not terribly happy to be raising tuition (both domestic and international) but they weren't sure how else to deal with the ongoing budgetary crisis at the U of A.

December 13th Board Meeting

The following morning was the last board meeting of 2013. Many important items were on the agenda, including the massive international tuition differential fee (IDF) increase and regular tuition increases. President Kusmu, GSA President Epperson, and myself all spoke in opposition to the international differential increases, as well as other fee increases. President Kusmu provided what I felt was an excellent alternative to the initial IDF proposal. The centre point of his proposal was a scaled-back fee increase that nevertheless saw substantial additional revenues for the University. Unfortunately, the majority of the board did not vote in favour of Kusmu's proposal, and we ultimately ended up voting on the original proposed fee increase.

Kusmu, Epperson, and I spoke against the resolution. In an excellent show of solidarity, academic staff association representative and law professor Wayne Renke also spoke and voted against the resolution. All arguments were varied but centered on a common theme: such an increase is fundamentally unfair to current and prospective international students, and likely to harm our international reputation in the short- and long-run.

One concession we did manage to win was a guarantee from board chair Doug Goss that emergency funding for international students would be bolstered significantly to account for any new financial hardship that may arise subsequent to the IDF increase. I pointed out, however, that regardless of this guarantee, there will still be many international students who will not be able to attend the University of Alberta following this increase. Despite our best efforts, the various tuition and fee increase proposals ultimately passed.

Despite the fact that our attempts to stop the increase were ultimately unsuccessful, we did manage to secure a small victory in the emergency funding increase. Moreover, several important lessons can be learned from this incident. Some of these lessons include:

1. The SU can be an extremely effective catalyst in organizing the student body around an

issue. There was a very large presence of students outside the meeting of the Board on

December 13th, and I think this demonstration lent a strong air of legitimacy to the arguments that myself, Epperson, and Kusmu were making. I think it's reasonable to assume that the number of students present at the meeting did much to encourage members to think twice before voting in favour of IDF and other increases.

2. Kusmu did an exceptional amount of work prior to the meeting – contacting members individually to discuss the proposed IDF increase with them. Despite the fact that we were ultimately unsuccessful, I could tell that his efforts were not in vain. At the holiday dinner previous to the meeting on the 13th, it was clear to me that members had a much more nuanced perspective than they might have ordinarily had. I also contacted each of the board members regarding the issue. From the responses I received, I'm confident that our efforts encouraged board members to spend more time than they would usually spend considering the issue.
3. The administration might think twice before proposing such a drastic IDF increase. This is because we were able to organize effective opposition to the proposal both on the board and in the larger university community.

Despite these lessons, I remain disappointed that the majority of the members of the board voted in favour of this increase. However there's no use in dwelling on the matter; I have many more board meetings to attend before my second term finishes. Should you have any questions about the December 13th, 2013 meeting of the board, please do not hesitate to be in touch.

In Solidarity,

Brent Kelly

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