

November 15th, 2013

To: Students' Council

From: Petros Kusmu, President 2013-2014

Re: Report to Students' Council (for November 19th, Meeting)

Hello Council!

It's been a while! A lot has happened since my last report – from major news to huge progress on our executive goals. Unfortunately, Vice-President External Adam Woods and I can't make it to the upcoming Council meeting since we'll be in Ottawa for the Canadian Alliance of Student Association's Advocacy Week in Ottawa. With that being said, I'll try to Skype in, if possible. In the meantime, here's a brief update on what I've been up to since October 18th.

- **International Students' Tuition Increase**

So this is going to undoubtedly be one of the biggest advocacy battles for the Students' Union (SU) this year. On Thursday, November 7th, the University's Vice President Finance and Administration, Phyllis Clark, called and informed me that international students tuition would see a net five percent increase to their tuition – one percent is from CPI, which is the government's regulation, and another four percent is the actual surprising increase. Later that afternoon, the SU received documents clearly outlining what the tuition increase would exactly look like. (I've attached the document to my report.)

Besides the fact that this tuition increase will result in international students paying an additional \$934.80 to \$1,645.40 next year, depending on which program they're in, what's disappointing is the actual consultation process. For over a month, the SU has been asking the institution to keep students apprised of international students' tuition increase would look like since the administration told us that this would be under consideration. Rather than include students early on in the discussion, we were given a document to consider for one working day and then have it brought forward to various governance committees immediately. Furthermore, the University's Deans' Council was presented with various options regarding international students weeks before students were a part of the conversation.

What's the rational for the extra four percent tuition increase? Two things. First, the University says that its costs for salaries, merit, and benefits are increasing approximately 3.6 percent annually. Second, the University states that the reason why it's a five percent and not a 4.6 percent increase is because there are other increasing costs – more specifically, information technology and library costs (apparently monographs are increasing at five percent a year... –_–).

After our meeting with the institution on Tuesday at our Tuition Budget Advisory Committee (TBAC), where we were "told" what the proposal was (i.e. not consulted with), we've been trying to inform as many students as possible about the tuition increase. Besides our social media blitz, I've also done interviews with the Metro and the Gateway. Additionally, we'll most likely be participating on an Alberta Primetime Television Panel about the issue. Furthermore, we'll talk about the increase in our monthly newsletter to students. Keep spreading the word!

The feedback so far has been overwhelming and it has been excellent to see domestic students stand in solidarity with their international colleagues. Right now, we need more students (especially domestic ones

to show solidarity) being involved and **council needs to play a role in this**. How? Start by attending the informal International Students' Association meetings every **Friday at 6PM in CAB 273**. Furthermore, be sure to attend the **Board of Governors meeting on Friday, December 13th from 8-10:00AM** so you can be there as the Governors vote on the motion.

- **External Provincial Advocacy**

As mentioned in my oral report to Council, all the student associations in the province participating in its second quarterly meeting with the Deputy Premier/Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education. What was particularly interesting about this quarterly was how a 30-60 minute Question & Answer session with the Deputy Premier turned into a three-hour discussion. There was a ton of questions thrown at the Deputy Premier regarding a bunch of things. I made sure to ask a question regarding the potential for international students tuition to increase and I received a relatively lackluster response at the time. Furthermore, myself and other student leaders continued to lambast the Deputy Premier for the budget cuts to our institutions.

On November 7th to 8th, the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) had its first advocacy event this year. We met with all of the post-secondary education (PSE) critics from each opposition party (MLA Kent Hehr from the Liberal Party of Alberta, MLA Bruce McAllister from the Wildrose Party, and MLA Rachel Notley from the New Democratic Party). We had excellent discussions regarding the state of our PSE institutions and even had them ask questions during Question Period. We focused primarily on the why the province needs to reinvest in our PSE institutions in the upcoming budget, regulating mandatory non-instructional fees, the creation of a new student employment program, and increasing non-repayable student financial aid. In our hour-long meeting with the Deputy Premier, we not only talked about the same things but I also included a discussion surrounding international students' tuition. This was a challenge since CAUS and the SU doesn't have a clearly articulated stance on international students (besides the fact that we're against it going up). The questions that were a challenge in addressing was something along the lines of, "At what point do stop international students taking more and more seats from domestic students? Where's the line? Should there be a quota? Or should it be completely merit-based?"

Furthermore, Ignite Alberta had the opportunity to present to the Deputy Premier's quarterly meeting with all of the PSE institution's board chairs. While I'm trying to move this file more on the plates of other student leaders, the Deputy Premier specifically stated that he'd like me to be one of the students who'd present this. This is the first time student representatives have ever presented to this group and the feedback from the board chairs was overwhelmingly positive. (On a side note, things are progressing well with Ignite. We requested a deadline extension from the Ministry so we can submit our final report in mid-/late-December since we had some challenges with distributing surveys at our PSE institutions."

- **Budget**

At the October 28th GFC meeting, Acting Provost Martin Ferguson-Pell briefed the institution about its budget. One of the interesting things from the presentation was the institution's plan to increase international student enrollment and how the Ministry was apparently "comfortable" with this idea.

But the obviously more exciting and interesting news in regards to the institution's budget was its recent \$14.4 million injection of mid-year funding from the provincial government. While we're all happy to see the government restore \$50 million of funding to the PSE sector (approximately two weeks before the Premier's Leadership Review... --), we're still extremely displeased with the budget cuts in the first

place. Vice President External Adam Woods did a great job in the media expressing these sentiments to the media and to MLAs during CAUS' advocacy days.

When I chatted with President Indira Samarasekera yesterday about the Leadership College, she noted that the funding would be tied to specifically bettering the student experience on campus, address student enrolment pressure in some faculties, and focus on long-term strategic objectives. Currently, it is pretty vague as to how this new funding will be divvied up but the President stated that the Ministry would have some degree of signing off on the institution's plans.

It should be noted that while all PSE-related stakeholders played an important part in government's decision to reinject more funding to our institutions (e.g. CAUS, the Council of Faculty Associations, the Coalition for Action on Post-Secondary Education, the Alberta Student Executive Council), I personally believe that the University's Board Chair, Douglass Goss, played perhaps one of the most influential roles. If you ever see him around, please be sure to give him a hi-five and a "thank you" for his relentless advocacy work to the provincial government. We all played an important part but he often doesn't get recognized for his work.

- **The Peter Lougheed Leadership Initiative and College**

Since The Gateway's explosive feature on the campus-wide discontent with the proposed Lougheed Leadership College component of the Lougheed Leadership Initiative, a lot has progressed on this front. On October 30th, Vice President Academic Dustin Chelen and I met with Dr. Peter Meekison – the University's point-person on the Leadership Initiative – to discuss the SU's discussion paper on the initiative. Apparently the Board Chair, President, and other influential community members on the project were really taken aback with the campus-wide discontent The Gateway reported on and wanted to remedy the situation immediately. Dr. Meekison really appreciated the SU's discussion paper and liked some of the ideas we had. After that, Dustin and I met with Board Chair Douglass Goss and expressed is discontent with how the entire process has been and wanted to make sure students were on board. As a result of that meeting, Dustin and I met with President Samarasekera yesterday to further discuss the SU's paper.

President Samarasekera was extremely receptive to our discussion paper and stated that she was along the same lines as us. She stated that the residence and the idea of a college are actually two very separate things and cited Innis College from the University of Toronto as an example to look at. Like Innis College, President Samarasekera thinks that there could be a Lougheed Leadership college that'd have an enrollment of, possible, ~1,900 students from a variety of faculties (much like Innis College) where a select few of them can live in a residence if they so choose too (i.e. the Loughed Leadership college). This is a massive departure from the University's original communications where the College was cited as an integral part of the leadership initiative where participating in the program was conditional on living in the residence. Additionally, President Samarasekera was receptive to the idea of creating an endowment fund to provide sustainable funding for currently leadership programs (i.e. Undergraduate Research Initiative, Emerging Leaders Program, Community Service Learning), funding for new leadership initiatives, and funding for faculty's to develop and sustain faculty-specific leadership certificates. Furthermore, the SU will have a seat at the table for the University of Alberta Lougheed Leadership Initiative's Academic Advisory Committee.

This is all great news and it's a huge step in the right direction. Right now, Dustin and I are tasked with further investigating what the Lougheed Leadership Initiative can look like on campus. (If you want to

get involved, please don't hesitate to email us!) Additionally, President Samarasekera is interested in convening a special Students' Council meeting in December where John Ferguson (the Chair of the entire Loughheed Leadership Initiative) and his partner can present to Council. This is an extremely exciting opportunity. Dustin and I will continue to keep Council posted on this front.

- **Residences**

On October 23rd, the SU, the Graduate Students' Association and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, and the University's Administration – more specifically, the Dean of Students (DoS), DoS' Student Affairs Officer, Associate Vice-President of Risk Management Services, and the University Secretary – began its four-part workshop on creating a consultation/engagement guideline between all of the stakeholders. This exercise is a part of the agreement that prevented the SU from taking the University to judicial review for its unilateral changes made to Lister Hall on July 23rd, 2013. So far these sessions are exceeding everyone's expectations and the conversations have been rich. So far, it is starting to change the way we all think about how the institution and how the SU and GSA can better engage with its stakeholders.

In other news, there have been some developments with the Lister Hall Students Association's (LHSA) cases from the University. For some context, last year's Students' Council supported the LHSA in defending itself against charges under the Code of Student Behavior (COSB). We expected these cases to be wrapped up by September. However, these cases have dragged on longer than expected despite the Dean of Students – one of the primary proponents behind these COSB charges – stating his support for the LHSA this year, which is a drastic step forward in the right direction. These cases bring up issues of fundamental fairness and justice in the university's discipline process and, as a result, the SU continues to support the LHSA. Unless these cases wrap up really soon, we'll be coming back to council for additional legal fees. In any case, I'm hoping Students' Council will receive a presentation to update everyone on this file.

- **Fostering Student Entrepreneurship on Campus**

This part of my executive goals has been progressing very nicely so far. Vice President Operations and Finance Josh Le, Vice President Student Life William Lau, and I had a meeting scheduled with Tod Babiak – one of the cofounders of Make Something Edmonton – to talk about all-things related to entrepreneurship and how the SU can play a role in it. Unfortunately, our meeting with him and his colleagues got rescheduled. However, we met with Ken Batista – one of founders of StartUp Edmonton – had an excellent conversation with him about the possibilities of fostering entrepreneurship on campus. One of the large outcomes from that meeting was the realization that the redevelopment of the North Power Plant (NPP) can be a large and integral part of fostering further entrepreneurship on campus (meaning that VP Le and I have to work more closely together on both files). Additionally, as a result of our meeting with Ken, I received a special ticket to attend StartUp Canada's event in Ottawa during my time in Ottawa for CASA's Advocacy Week. Furthermore, Ken stated that he's willing to use his political clout to assist the SU in its efforts to foster entrepreneurship on campus if we need it.

In addition to that, VP Le, VP Lau, and I participated CAPS' StartUpU's weeklong event on fostering entrepreneurship activities on campus. It was an absolute blast and I plan on meeting with CAPS' director to talk about the SU's interest in this.

- **Fall Reading Week (FRW)**

A lot has happened on the FRW file. VP Chelen and I presented to the Dean of Students' Council on Student Affairs where we received overwhelming support from its members in the FRW scenario the SU is proposing. Additionally, we met with Deans and Associate Deans from the Faculty of Arts, ALES, and Science to get feedback and support on our proposal. While things were looking positive, there was a turn of events. Our objective of having a FRW scenario passing through university governance by December 2nd so Fall 2014 can receive a FRW didn't pan out due to a really bad governance schedule in November and December. Currently, our objective is to have it approved in early February so that Fall 2015 can see a FRW. While this was a disappointment, I'm still unbelievably determined to ensure that a FRW scenario gets passed this year. In the meantime, VP Chelen and I will be building more support from Deans.

- **Gender Diversity in Elections**

Things have been progressing on the executive's goal of having great inclusivity – primarily on ensuring greater diversity in governance. In the SU's Social and Environmental Responsibility Committee, there have been some great ideas surrounding how to get greater gender diversity in elections – from hosting elections workshops early on in the year to subsidizing the costs of attending external election workshops. Furthermore, VP Chelen and I worked with Stephen Chin – former ISSS President – on his project to get more women involved in elections by outlining what are the current barriers and issues facing gender diversity in the SU's governance structures and providing our thoughts on how this could be remedied.

- **Miscellaneous**

Other things to take note of:

- **Athletics** – Part of our executive goals is to bolster the profile of athletics on campus. Some of the executives and I attended multiple Bears and Pandas games where there has been excellent turnout. VP Lau and I are in talks with some folks from Athletics on how we can further bolster attendance to athletic games and some of the ideas floating around is ensuring that all games are free. (Side note: Congratulations to the Pandas Rugby team for being CIS and Western Champions!!!)
- **Student Council Engagement Task Force (SCET)** – Another goal of mine is reform to Students' Council. I'm glad to say that SCET has been doing an excellent job in investigating on the different ways council can be reformed to ensure greater engagement with its constituents. Major shout outs to all of its members, especially to its Chair (i.e. Councillor Natalia) and its student-at-large representatives (i.e. Seamus, Lok, and Fabian).
- **Students' Council Alumni Chapter** – I'm in talks with folks from the University of Alberta Alumni Association to create an alumni association chapter for Students' Council. This should be a really neat side project.

That's it for now folks. Till next time!

Signing off,



Petros Kusmu

[President](#) 2013-2014 | [University of Alberta Students' Union \(UASU\)](#)
Governor | [University of Alberta Board of Governors](#)

P: (780) 492-4236 | **F:** (780) 492-4643 | **E:** president@su.ualberta.ca

Address: 2-900 Students' Union Building (SUB); Edmonton, AB T6G 2J7

Twitter: [@UASUpresident](#)

LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/petros-kusmu/34/b50/605>