

November 28th, 2013

To: Students' Council

From: Petros Kusmu, President 2013-2014

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

Hello Council!

Hope all is swell on your end. Here's a brief update on what I've been up to since November 15th.

- **External Federal Advocacy**

Last week, Vice-President External Adam Woods and I attended the Canadian Alliance of Student Association's (CASA) annual Advocacy Week in Ottawa, Ontario from November 18th to November 22nd. Two things occurred throughout this week. First, over sixty CASA delegates from nearly 26 student associations across the country had over 125 meetings with Members of Parliament, Senators, policy advisors, civil servants, and other post-secondary education-related stakeholders (e.g. the Assembly of First Nations). Second, CASA held its plenary where various policies and issues were discussed.

CASA lobbied on the following issues:

1. Reforming the **Canada Student Loan and Grant Program** (CSLP and CSGP)
 - a. Increase the weekly student loan limit from \$210 per week to \$245 per week
 - b. Increase the CSGP by 7.5% and tie further increases to the rate of inflation
 - c. Exempt all in-study income
 - d. Exempt the value of a single vehicle from the CSLP assessments of borrower assets
 - e. Exempt personal investments up to a total of \$10,000 and increase the value of RRRSP exemptions by \$790 per year
 - i. NOTE: This is geared towards making the CSLP more inclusive to mature students
2. Bettering the **International Student** Experience Here in Canada
 - a. Make all awarded study permits multiple entry visas instead of single entry visas
 - b. Give part-time international students the ability to work off-campus
3. Making Canada's Post-Secondary Sector more **Innovative**
 - a. Appoint a student representative to each of the governing councils of the federal granting agencies
 - b. Have the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (SAST) undertake a study to explore and provide recommendations on how the federal government can support and promote Open Educational Resources (OER)
4. Increasing the Post-Secondary Participation Rate of **Aboriginal Students**
 - a. Have the federal government remove the 2% cap on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program's (PSSSP) funding and fully fund the program to increase access to funding
 - b. Have the federal government fund the backlog of students eligible for the PSSSP
5. Breaking Down Silos and Busting Stigmas associated to **Student Mental Health**
 - a. Have the Mental Health Commission of Canada actively pursue campaigns on university and college campuses across the country aimed at decreasing the stigma associated with mental health issues
 - b. Make mental illness detection, prevention, and intervention for youth in post-secondary

an imminent priority in the Public Health Agency of Canada's "Strengthened Integrated Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy Framework"

Furthermore, I had lobby meetings with the following individuals:

1. Senator Claudette Tardif (from the Liberal Party of Canada)
2. MP Laurin Liu (from the New Democratic Party of Canada)
3. MP Rathika Sitsabaiesan (from the New Democratic Party of Canada)
4. MP Andrew Cash (from the New Democratic Party of Canada)
5. Senior Policy Advisor to the Minister of Labour, Alexandra Valcourt
6. MP Linda Duncan (from the New Democratic Party of Canada)
7. Senator Tobias Enverga (from the Conservative Party of Canada)
8. Leader of the Official Opposition, MP Thomas Mulcair (from the New Democratic Party of Canada)
9. Senior Policy Advisor to the Minister of Finance, Gabrielle Berard

From my understanding, the two biggest things CASA got a lot of traction on was our changes to the CSLP and the undertaking of an OER strategy. For instance, in our meeting with the Policy Advisor to the Minister of Finance, CASA's asks for changes to the CSLP – primarily on in-study income and vehicle exemption – was well received. Furthermore, Senators seemed very receptive to our ask on having the Senate's SAST committee undertake a study on OERs – especially since the Chair of the SAST committee expressed his huge interest in this matter and made an informal commitment to further investigating this.

At the CASA plenary a number of political policies were approved (i.e. Open Education Resources, Creating a grant for Graduate Students with High Financial Need, and Expanding PhD graduate fast-track residency through the federal skilled worker program) and a couple of them were rejected (i.e. Optimizing Programs for Commercialization and Government Leadership in Commercialization). Furthermore, the membership received oral and written reports from CASA's various committees, staff, and its board.

- **Fostering Student Entrepreneurship on Campus**

As I mentioned in my previous council report, I received two free tickets to attend Startup Canada's Day on the Hill reception event in Ottawa during CASA's Advocacy Week from Ken Bautista – Co-Founder/CEO of Startup Edmonton. VP Woods and I attended the reception and had a blast learning more about the entrepreneurship scene in Canada. Furthermore, we networked with various individuals that gave me some excellent ideas as to how student entrepreneurship could be better fostered on university campuses. Furthermore, I got featured in iPolitics's Soapbox Question on "What do you think should be in a national strategy for entrepreneurs?" (Check it out here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=YVtCA3N_xMg).

- **International Students' Tuition Increase**

After my time in Ottawa, I have spent the majority of this week working on the international students' tuition issue. At the Monday, November 25th General Faculties Council meeting, Vice-President Student Life William Lau and I vehemently questioned the University administration on their proposal to increase international students' tuition. Later that evening, the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) President and I continued to raise our discontent with this proposal at a Board of Governor's dinner. After discussing the recently published Renaissance Committee's report – a report that proposes a range of

academic reforms to the institution. The GSA President then made the case that the problem with increasing international graduate students' tuition is that there is no uniformity with graduate student funding across faculties unlike other peer institutions. This argument resonated with parts of the Renaissance Committee's report that the institution is too decentralized and ultimately board members believed the institution needed to get its "house in order" with graduate student education prior to asking graduate students to pay for more. (It is important to keep in mind that graduate student reform has been a long objective of the university administration and board.)

While this is a positive development, I am truly convinced that the institution will not only propose an international graduate students' tuition increase next year but they will also propose a graduate student market modifier to increase the base graduate student tuition – something the institution tried to do early Fall 2013.

But, this is overall a positive development. At the Board Finance and Property Committee (BFPC) and special Board of Governor's meeting mid-week, I continued to make the case against the increase to international undergraduate tuition. In addition to meeting with the Provost and Board Chair this week, I have informed all of the Board members that I would be contacting them to arrange one-on-one meetings to further discuss the problematic tuition increase proposal. Hopefully this can sway the Board of Governor's vote on the tuition proposal on December 13th. In the meantime, the SU's Advocacy Department is continuing their research on helping us craft a stronger argument against the institution's proposal.

If you're interested in getting involved, email me for information and check out www.su.ualberta.ca/international. (Be sure to take part in the online letter writing campaign form!)

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

Signing off,



Petros Kusmu

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