

February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014

**To:** Students' Council

**From:** Petros Kusmu, President 2013-2014

**Re:** Report to Students' Council (for February 11<sup>th</sup>, Meeting)

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Hello Council!

Instead of providing you a report for the Main Agenda, I figured I'd provide give you one for the Late Additions. Why? Well since we had Council last week, my Main Agenda report would be a report for two days worth of work whereas for the Late Addition I can report on six days worth of work.

On another note, here's a friendly reminder for you to RUN in the upcoming executive elections! Nomination deadlines are due this Friday and you can pick up a nomination deadline from SUB 2-900.

With that being said, here's a brief update on what I've been up to since February 4<sup>th</sup>.

- **Fall Reading Week (FRW)**

What's the progress with truly finalizing a FRW? Having the Provost sign off on a set of proposed changes to the University's policies/procedures and etc. Right now, the Provost's office is currently working on creating that text. In the meantime, VP Academic Dustin Chelen, the Dr. Bill Connor from the Provost's Office, and I will be presenting to the Academic Staff Association University of Alberta (AASUA) this week to solicit any final feedback on the soon-to-be-implemented FRW. I'll keep you posted on when we can arrange a press conference/signing ceremony with the Provost.

- **Rent Rates and Leases at the Tamarack and Pincrest Residence**

I recently got informed from a friend of mine who lives in Tamarack and Pincrest (T&P) – the newly built residences in the East Campus Village – that earlier this month the University told T&P residents their rent would increase. This was extremely problematic since she and other T&P residents signed an agreement (i.e. lease) with the University on a set rental rate per month. As a result, VP Student Life William Lau brought me along to one of his Residence Advisory Committee (RAC) meetings and we raised this issue to the University's Residence Services (RS). They promised to follow-up with us 72-hours after the meeting and RS ended up deciding to not increase the rent.

Furthermore, my friend also mentioned how problematic it was for the University to offer T&P students' leases that end on July 31<sup>st</sup>. This is extremely odd since most students would vacate their residence at the end of the Winter semester (i.e. April 30<sup>th</sup>). VP Lau and I raised our concerns with how inconvenient it is to offer students 7-, 11-, and 12-month leases to students since 4-, and 8-month leases are significantly more flexible to students. RS said that if they are to change the length of the leases, they would have to increase rental rates to students (by potentially 25%) since their original business plan for the T&P residences was based off of the fact that leases would be 11-months (which is a terrible assumption, in my humble opinion). I've had more student complaints about this so far.

In the meantime, please tell your friends ask your friends who live T&P if they've received a follow-up email from RS confirming that their rent will not increase in the middle of their lease. Furthermore, please tell them to send me their feedback on having an 11-month lease or increased rental rates for 8-

month leases.

- **External Advocacy Success + International Students**

One of CASA's asks for a number of years was a change to the visa processing for Canadian international students so that it'd be easier for them to travel out and into the country – i.e. multiple-entry visas. This is especially important for international students who want to visit family, study, or work abroad while not wanting to compromise their Canadian study visa. In case you missed it, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration adopted our lobby priority on multiple-entry visas a week or so ago and implemented the changes last week. Federal advocacy for the win!

- **Block Week Courses**

Since Councillor Mohamed asked for an update, I figured I might as well include it in my Council report.

During my Presidential campaign, the general feedback I received from students on the Block Week courses idea was mixed. Some really liked the idea, some thought it wasn't the best idea, and others were indifferent. The general consensus though was that it would be worthwhile having the SU investigate in it and discuss the merits of advocating for Block Week courses in Council. Therefore, the mandate I received from students was primarily research and discussion on the issue. Beyond that, I plan on sharing my research results to faculty-associations since I've already had a faculty association leader request this research in their advocacy efforts for curriculum review at their faculty. Furthermore, as I mentioned in my campaign platform and executive goals document, once this research is finalized and input is received from Council and other student leaders, I'm hoping to strike up a conversation with the University's Provost about the merits of Block Week courses when we have a solid understanding on it. As with the FRW initiative, I imagine this will be a multi-year initiative.

- **Fostering Student Entrepreneurship on Campus**

Last week, VP Lau, VP Operations and Finance Josh Le, VP External Adam Woods, and General Manager Marc Dumouchel visited the School of Business' eHUB office – i.e. their student entrepreneurship office in HUB mall. eHUB and other components of the "Entrepreneurship @ UAlberta" initiative is the School of Business' way to foster cross-faculty student entrepreneurship opportunities and it has been a great success so far. In late January, they held an Entrepreneurship 101 where students pitched their startup ideas to other students, faculty, media outlets, and investors in hopes of finding team members, software developers, investors, connections, or whatever else they're looking for. Dr. Qasim Rasi – the person leading the Entrepreneurship @ UAlberta file – loves it that the SU is interested in this file and he's excited at the thought of transforming the North Power Plant into a "Mercer Tavern"-type of space – a mix of social space (e.g. coffee shop and a pub) and a collaborative work environment (e.g. work stations). Furthermore, he's very appreciative of our efforts in trying to communicate to students the various entrepreneurship opportunities that they can take advantage of. Currently, we're waiting to hear back from Qasim on his feedback for the NPP space. Additionally, in our upcoming newsletter, we will include some information on how students can get involved with Entrepreneurship @ UAlberta's initiatives.

- **Ignite: Ideas for Post-Secondary Education + Quarterly Roundtable Meeting with the Minister and Student Leaders**

Ignite Alberta's press conference last week was extremely successful. Our press conference had coverage on all of the major TV and newspaper outlets in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. Furthermore, we had all of the opposition political parties create media statements in regards to our findings and further

pressured the provincial government to take our research seriously.

This weekend, myself and the President of the Students' Association at MacEwan University (SAMU) presented our findings to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education Dave Hancock, civil servants from the Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education, and student leaders from around the province at our quarterly roundtable meeting with the Minister. Our findings were well received from him and the other student leaders around the room. There is a serious conversation taking place provincially on: a. What are ways we can start thinking about shaping the future of higher education in Alberta?; and b. How do we ensure that we're hearing student concerns loud and clear? The Ministry is interested in continuing this conversation and we're in the works of establishing a meeting with them soon so we can figure out how we can translate the feedback we heard from students in our report to tangible policies. I've attached Ignite's second report to Council's Late Additions as an information item.

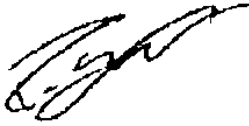
Some interesting things that were brought up in our meeting with the Minister:

- The Minister mentioned that he would most likely provide post-secondary institutions extra operational grants to make up for the tuition freeze from last year;
  - The Federal Government's plan to want to double the amount of international students in Canada and have more Canadian students study abroad was a conversation that didn't really take place with the Provincial Government;
  - **The Minister said he believed it was "unfair" to increase an international student's tuition in the middle of their program. (He said something along the lines of "unfair to change the bargain half way through.")**
  - The Minister said that he's not sure if the Post-Secondary Learning Act (PSLA) will open up any time soon. But, if anything, the PSLA but open up a bit in the fall for slight tweaks – not a fundamental rethinking or large-scale change to the Act itself.
  - The Minister is more interested in the post-secondary system being seen as a K-16 system since he believes having a basic degree is a "public good".
- **Student Council Engagement Taskforce (SCET) Recommendations**  
Since Councillor Binczyk asked me a question on how the Executives will implement SCET's recommendations, I figured I'd address it in my report. Simply put, I'll raise this as a discussion item in our upcoming executive committee meetings prior to the SU elections commencing so we can figure out how we can make some strides towards SCET's recommendations. While it may be unrealistic to expect that the executive committee can implement a slew of changes immediately with what's left in our terms in office, we will surely try our best to do what we can! As someone who's been on Council for nearly six years and a strong proponent of SCET, I am personally vested in SCET's recommendations being implemented.
  - **International Students + President Samarasekera**  
I am in the works of not only ensuring the University's Provost and VP International present to Students' Council on its plan to improve the undergraduate international student experience after its increase to the international differential fee, but I am also working hard to ensure that President Samarasekera will speak to Students' Council at that same time. I aiming for this conversation to take place in March when the President and her team has formulated a more concrete understanding of what actions they'll take to improve the international undergraduate experience since the President promised to provide a report of this kind of the Board of Governor's meeting on March 14<sup>th</sup>.

That's it for now folks. Best of luck to all of the folks running the upcoming elections! With that being said, the Executives and I only have 55 (working) days left in office...

Till next time!

Signing off,



**Petros Kusmu**

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