

Date: 01/25/22**To:** Students' Union Council**Re:** President Report 01/25/22

Dear Council,

I hope you are all well, and not too discouraged by the continuation of online classes. While this is a difficult time for all of us, I really do believe once we are back in person in March it will be for good. You can read some of my thoughts on the issue in today's [Globe and Mail](#) and last week's [Gateway](#). In this situation there are no perfect options, and we are in the position of having to choose lesser evils. I am very conscious that the decision to return in March is not the favoured one for many students— but overall I believe it strikes the right balance in addressing the diversity of needs that exist in our community.

Ongoing Advocacy: Exceptional Tuition Increases

This week, I met with the Provost and President to discuss flaws in the exceptional tuition increase proposals and hear the University's position and justifications. It is important for us to understand the University's position so we can be prepared to respond. I cannot share specific details of the meeting at this time, but they did not have substantive responses to some of our most serious concerns.

I also met with the new Chief of Staff to the Minister, Mandi Johnson, to discuss the same problems. She will be discussing the issues with Department officials, and we will be having a followup meeting in early February.

Classes Online until February 28th

As you will all be aware, the University announced last Friday that we will be returning to campus of February 28th. While it is disappointing to be continuing to learn online for another month, I believe this is an understandable decision given that Omicron continues to improve in other provinces while it worsens here. What we value the most for students is safety and certainty. Targeting an earlier return date would have created a substantial risk of needing to pivot quickly online again, which we believe should be avoided at all costs. We have received a very large volume of questions and correspondence, so I apologize if we haven't gotten back to you yet— we will get through all emails from affected students as soon as we can.

We have been working to address a number of issues affecting students in the meantime. Here is a small, non-exclusive list:

- Clarifying that the University absolutely plans to reopen on February 28th. The confusion over the University's messaging has been very challenging for us, as many students interpreted the decision as an extension of online learning to February 28th but with no certain decision after that. That is not the case– the University fully expects to return on February 28th and at this stage there is no reason to believe otherwise. This is very important as students must make plans to be in Edmonton on the 28th if at all possible.
- For students who cannot be in Edmonton on time, we are working to ensure appropriate accommodations can be provided for them. International students stuck outside of Canada face the largest challenge, but some online and hybrid options are also essential for students who may have to isolate.
- There have been numerous reports of students being required to back in Edmonton at strange times for only one course, one lab, one exam, etc. VP Monteiro and I are working through these on a case by case basis.
- We are working to ensure the best possible access to optional in-person facilities, and that students are receiving as much value for fees as possible under the circumstances.
- We have been working to tie up loose ends for students in residence, included ensuring that students who are out of Canada will receive the same rent rebate as students who move out for the month of February. This is a very important savings for students, and a significant benefit to not coming back to campus before reading week.

Lastly, I want you all to know that we are closely monitoring the situation as AASUA, NASA, and the University advance in the collective bargaining process. We closely watched the strike at Concordia, though in respect of the Concordia Students' Association's wishes we did not engage in any way. We continue to hope that both sides come to a mutually acceptable agreement– one that respects the limited means of the University, but that enables strong recruitment and retention of instructors. You are welcome to get in touch at any time if you have questions.

Sincerely,



University of Alberta Students' Union President
Rowan Ley