

Emerson Csorba VPA First Report (for May 3 meeting)

Prepared by: Emerson Csorba, VPA – 21 April 2011



To: University of Alberta Student Council

Introduction

First off, I hope that exams went well for you guys, and that you are all taking some time off to relax. In this report, I will touch on some of my goals for the upcoming year. Although I have a strong idea of what I intend to do in 2011-2012, the approach taken to the achievement of the VPA goals will transform based on your input and leadership. Moreover, I will provide an outline of some important dates related to the VPA portfolio for the upcoming year, in addition to some dates where I will be out of the city. So without further ado, the initial report.

Recap of the last month of transition

The last handful of weeks has been tremendously busy, though I feel that they have provided good preparation for my term as VPA. I participated on two interview panels – for the Student Governance Officer and Student Ombudspersons – attended many General Faculties Council standing committee meetings and met individually with numerous students, faculty members and university administrators. Lastly, I attended the Council of Faculty Associations (CoFA) retreat on April 9, where I met some of the students that will lead FAs over the next year. In particular, a motion was passed in my initial CoFA meeting that mandates the VPA to talk with the Centre for Student Development in order to establish a 50-minute block of time that FAs can host during Orientation.

Key goals for Vice-President Academic

Over the past month, as I have met with numerous individuals on campus and participated in different meetings, some of my goals have changed. My focus will still be on what I discussed during the election period; however, with more knowledge, my approach is now more detailed and informed. Here are some key goals:

Undergraduate Research

Before I touch on what I plan to do, I think that it is important to discuss an issue raised against this platform point during elections. A number of students were concerned that the focus on research will further exacerbate the problem regarding teaching on campus. In my opinion, ensuring that more undergraduate students have a research experience during university is beneficial to the student body. But you should still continue to challenge the idea that teaching and research are interconnected. Without critical analysis, this notion – which Allan Tupper and Tom Pocklington deem the “myth of mutual enrichment” – becomes vacuous rhetoric. So please think about this idea – that research enhances teaching – and if you want, discuss it with friends, fellow councillors, professors and me.

Here is a brief outline of my plans:

- Undergraduate Research Symposium for November 17 and 18. The research symposium will allow students from all faculties to present their work and meet engaged professors that will act as judges. There will also be keynote speakers, and panels focusing on different research-related issues. This will be a good time to promote undergraduate research on campus, through Yaffle and the new Undergraduate Research Initiative (formerly called the Office of Undergraduate Research and Engagement).
- Ensure that the new centralized research database, Yaffle, provides opportunities for students in all faculties.
- The university found \$200 000, which will go to undergraduate research. About \$50 000 of this is projected to go to Roger S. Smith scholarships. The other funds should go to an array of research opportunities, such as internships and perhaps travel to different conferences. If you have ideas regarding where funding should go, please share them with me.

Graduate Attributes

As I stated during the executive elections, this is an emerging topic on campus. At a recent GFC Committee on the Learning Environment meeting that I attended on April 7, a subcommittee was created to work on the issue of graduate attributes and competencies.

Over the next year, this will be a topic that I will bring to councillors and faculty associations in particular. An ideal process for graduate attributes, based on the copious amounts of literature on this topic, would involve the following: A) considerable consultation of various stakeholders on campus, such as students, faculty, parents, employers and administrators; B) precise terminology (there is a distinct difference between the terms *attributes/qualities* and *competencies/skills*); C) curriculum reform in order to work up to the qualities/attributes selected by the university; D) assessment in order to gauge whether students develop the qualities set out.

Some university faculties are well underway with their graduate attributes plan, which is commendable. Now is the time for the Students' Union to take a leadership position in this realm.

Peer Mentorship

As I've met with various stakeholders on campus, my perspective regarding the approach to this initiative as changed. Here are a few important points to keep in mind:

- The Required to Withdraw (RTW) process will likely be changing within the university (the Dean of Students and the Academic Policies and Procedures Review Task Force have taken the lead here). For students that face RTW after first year on campus, there is the possibility that they will go to Open Studies, instead of dropping out. At this point, a

peer mentorship process could work with students that have had academic difficulties in their most recent year of study.

- Another possibility is creating a Students' Union-specific peer mentorship program, to work in conjunction with services. If this is to occur, then I would like to see a pilot program ready to go by Orientation.

Lastly, InfoLink has been doing a superlative job researching and preparing for a tutoring program. One of my questions at the moment is the following: how do *tutoring* and *mentoring* programs differ? My initial response is that tutoring is more academic-focused, whereas mentoring links students to social activities.

This program will develop throughout the summer, and I will be banking on many councillors to provide leadership here.

Some more topics for the VPA in the upcoming year

Although I ran on three campaign points, the VPA will deal with many more issues. Here are some of them:

- Revisions to the international study abroad transfer credit system: At the moment, students that study abroad tend to face problems finding courses at international partner institutions that line up with courses required to graduate at the University of Alberta. Students have to do considerable research on their own, whereas UBC has a chart that compares international courses to their UBC equivalent course for credit.
- There is the possibility that some faculty associations will be on probation in the upcoming year. Although the Interdepartmental Science Student Society (ISSS) was rare in that its executive was composed of an incredible team of leaders, I will work diligently to ensure that FAs on probation improve just as the ISSS did throughout the year.
- Continuing to work toward the implementation of a fall reading week is important to me. Rory and I will play an important role in these discussions over the upcoming year.
- I may work closely with the Office of Sustainability, and in particular, with one of its three branches: the Office of Sustainability Academic Advisory Committee (OSAAC). Two students that work within ECOS have come to me in order to share an idea regarding a double-sided examinations policy. I will be meeting with these students over the next weeks in order to establish a more concrete plan.

Important dates

November 17-18: At the moment, these are the two scheduled dates for the Students' Union's inaugural undergraduate research symposium. The event is likely to occur in Dinwoodie Lounge upstairs.

September 6-7: These two dates mark Orientation. Many councillors are serving as TFs or OVs, so you will be active participants here. For those not volunteering for Orientation, do your best to make it out and talk with incoming high school and transfer students. This is arguably the Students' Union's most notable tradition, and it is one of the best times of year. I hope to have a peer mentorship program set up by this time.

Travel time

April 30-May 5: Will be away for SU executive retreat.

May 14-23: I will be in Poland and Germany during this time, for the March of Remembrance and Hope.

June 13-20: I will be in Saskatoon for the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education annual conference.

August 26-28: I might be in Toronto.

Over the upcoming months, I will keep you all informed of any travel time that I may take. In any case, I'll have council reports prepared well in advance of the trips, and will attempt to Skype in order to attend meetings.

Reading materials for interested councillors

Some of my suggested reading materials for councillors are as follows (these are good sources for university-related material):

- *No Place to Learn* by Allan Tupper and Tom Pocklington
- *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, which you can find online

Conclusion

The last month of transition has been quite busy, and I feel prepared to formally begin as VPA on May 1. The summer will require considerable amounts of work, and I will turn to many councillors and other students to fine-tune some plans under the VPA portfolio. Please ask me any questions that come to mind, and I will do my best to answer them thoroughly.

If you need to contact me, please do so at vp.academic@su.ualberta.ca.

Solidarity,

Emerson Csorba