

# Vice-President Academic Council Report

11 May 2011

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**To:** Student Council

Hi councillors,

The first few weeks as Vice-President Academic have been fairly smooth, and I am slowly developing a fuller understanding of the position. During my first days in office, I scheduled dozens of meetings with different stakeholders on campus, in order to hit the ground running. These efforts have paid off, as the individuals that I have met with have provided good ideas regarding what the SU and university should do in order to grow. This report focuses on a few different themes in particular: sustainability, university governance and the University of Alberta Bridging Program.

## Sustainability

To begin, I have met on a few occasions with Ian Moore (the Director of ECOS) and Louise Veillard (a former Director of ECOS and member of OSAAC, which I will explain below). Since I will include sustainability-related initiatives in the VPA portfolio this year, these early meetings are important in shaping my goals and setting the right course for the remainder of the year.

Although the year has just started, the SU has made one important gain: the VPA now sits on the Office of Sustainability Academic Advisory Committee (OSAAC) as an SU representative, in addition to a student representative from ECOS. For those that do not know, the Office of Sustainability separates into three branches, each of which has a committee: Outreach and Engagement, Facilities, Operations Services, and Academic Teaching and Research. Sitting on the last of these committees (OSAAC) is a positive step for the VPA portfolio and for students.

## University Governance

At our first Council meeting, Rory talked about the Student Governance Office, and I will further elaborate below. Over the last weeks, I have been working closely with the Student Governance Advisor, Amanda Henry and the Student Governance Officer, Giselle General. The progress that this office has made over the last year is tremendous, and because of this, the next year is looking auspicious.

On 11 May, the undergraduate student at-large representatives on GFC standing committees met to discuss the upcoming year. In my opinion, this meeting went quite well, and provided the students in attendance with a clearer picture of the year to come. The mentorship provided by this office was evident, and will continue over the upcoming year.

The next governance-related meeting is likely GFC Student Caucus (GFCSC), which the VPA chairs. If you are on the General Faculties Council, then make sure that you attend. Although the

date for GFCSC has not been set, it will occur near the end of the month, likely between 27 and 30 May.

## **Bridging Program**

International student support is an important issue, and the university is doing well at it through the Bridging Program. In a recent blog post (it will go up on the SU website soon), I wrote the following:

*During the 2011 SU executive campaign, I talked briefly about the implementation of what is generally called a “Foundation Year” program. Foundation Year is prevalent at Australian universities, and has been established at Simon Fraser University, through a private company called Navitas.*

*The University of Alberta is not following in the footsteps of SFU or Australian universities. Rather, it is improving the current U of A Bridging Program, which provides ESL courses (ESL 140 and 145) to international students in their first year at the university. Basically, the new Bridging Program will introduce a new course, ESL 135, in order to open up to a larger number of international students, and provide additional transition support to the students in the program. The fact that the University of Alberta is running this program internally, instead of outsourcing to a private company, is impressive and well-received by the Students’ Union.*

Over the last year, I was concerned that the University of Alberta might follow the example of Foundation Year programs in Australia, and establish a private college on campus that would help transition international students with weaknesses in English or certain courses (math, biology, etc.) to the university. Simon Fraser University currently does this, and no doubt profits considerably from international students that do not quite meet university entrance requirements.

However, former Dean of Students, Dr. Bill Connor, has studied and led changes to the U of A’s current Bridging Program. At the moment, this program is targeted at international students that require improvements to their English speaking and writing skills. Through this program, students take ESL 140 and 145 and one other course. Dr. Connor’s changes to the program would introduce ESL 135 and enhance international student support. At the moment, the program includes about 220 students, though this number will jump over the next years.

Following my meeting with Dr. Connor, I tweeted the following:

*Very excited to see what Dr. Connor has done with the U of A Bridging Program, and that it is being run internally by the university!*

## **Students Interested in Council**

On Friday 6 May, I attended SIC, which brought together numerous councillors and students not on Council that are interested in the Students' Union. The discussion at SIC was lively and rich, and I came away with some interesting ideas that will perhaps shape my upcoming year. I very much hope that SIC continues throughout the year, and will do my best to continue to attend these meetings.

## Conclusion

From 14 to 23 May, I will be away in Europe. During this time, I will not have my cell phone or even a laptop. Because of this, I will reply to whatever you send me as soon as I get back.

In solidarity,

-Emerson Csorba  
Vice-President Academic, Students' Union