

VPA Council Report

Date: November 4 2011

Hi everyone,

Over the last three weeks, the large majority of my time and energy has been placed squarely on the Undergraduate Research Symposium. I am satisfied with the amount of work that the URS Team has done, but do not want to get too comfortable as there is plenty of preparation left over the next two weeks. Although I have also worked on student attributes and several other topics, the main focus of this report is the symposium progress.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

There are many things to update Council about, so I am going in no particular order. First off, over the last four days, I have worked with the SU Marketing Department to fundraise \$7000, which will go strictly to student awards to be provided to students with excellent research projects at the November 18 poster competition. During the 2011 executive elections, I said on numerous occasions that I would hit a goal of fundraising \$10 000 for the symposium. And I plan on fulfilling that goal, with the deadline being November 11. (Note that the SU received \$10 000 as a base budget for the symposium, and that this \$7000 of fundraising is on top of the \$10 000 we received.)

Moreover, we received over 130 student abstract submissions for the symposium and have reviewed 60 of them. The other 70 will be reviewed by the end of the day (Friday) and I will attempt to respond to the students tonight. On Thursday November 3, I wrote a quick blog post for the su.ualberta.ca website where I briefly described the last 20 minutes before the 5pm abstract submission deadline. It was crazy, to say the least!

Additionally, we are working with the SU Events staff to plan the November 17 Opening Dinner and Keynote Speech event in Dinwoodie Lounge, to be attended by about 200 people. The speeches will commence at 6:15pm with a 5-10 minute speech from Dr. Samarasekera and continue with speeches by Dr. Connie Varnhagen, three undergraduate students with creative research projects and then Dr. John Nychka from Engineering, who is the keynote speaker.

I have helped assemble a team of 30 professors who will serve as judges during the November 18 poster competition. These judges come from a wide variety of disciplines across campus: Physics, Women's Studies, Political Sciences, Mathematics, Human Ecology, Electrical Engineering and so on.

One of the major focuses of the event is sharing student and professor stories. Every student submission needs to be accompanied by a brief paragraph about how the student got involved and how the research has affected their undergraduate experience. Although these stories add

richness to the symposium, they also provide more insight into how the SU should advocate to the university for more undergraduate research opportunities in the future.

On Monday or Tuesday of next week, we will launch a “Big Idea” contest, though you will see the particular details through the poster and SUBTV campaign! I feel that this contest will engage students not currently doing research and who would otherwise have little reason to attend the symposium.

This is not an exhaustive description of the symposium progress, so I invite councillors to ask whatever questions they have. Overall, this work could not be done without the leadership of the URS Team, which has been incredible over the last month. A big thank you goes out to all of them.

STUDENT ATTRIBUTES

The CLE Subcommittee on Attributes and Competencies met for an hour on November 3 and focused on dividing the committee members into two working groups: undergraduate and graduate. We also had a lengthy discussion regarding the mandate of the committee and the work that needs to be done by the working groups (namely, consultation) over the next months.

Additionally, the Interdepartmental Science Students Society (ISSS) has written a superb report that summarizes the views of ISSS representatives at the faculty, department and program levels regarding student attributes. Once the symposium is over, I plan to work with other faculty associations to produce similar documents.

CANADIAN STUDENT NURSING ASSOCIATION

From October 28-30, the CNSA and NUA hosted the Western Regional Conference for the Canadian Student Nursing Association, which brought over 100 student delegates from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba to the U of A. This conference was led by Councillor Bellinger, who on a very tight timeline put together a highly successful conference that also came in under budget. I served as the co-sponsorship chair on the executive committee, along with Maggie Danko, who put a tremendous amount of work into the conference. Overall, we exceeded \$8000 for sponsorship funding. A huge congrats goes out to Councillor Bellinger, Maggie Danko and the rest of the organizing team.

GOVERNANCE

With the start of each month comes a slew of GFC governance meetings. I attended the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment and the GFC Academic Standards Committee Subcommittee on Standards, with the GFC Executive Committee taking place on Monday November 7. Both of the agendas were fairly lean. Of note was the Gwyn Morgan speech at General Faculties Council, where he provided an interesting vision of Canadian universities.

Although much of his speech was anecdotal, based off the views of his nephew, I agree with some points that he raised.

TALKING TO STUDENTS

Once the symposium finishes, I plan on spending 1-2 hours per week just going around campus talking to different students, asking them what they enjoy and value in their academic experience, what could be better, what they think of SU initiatives and so on. Over the last few months, I'm pleased that I have done this on a few occasions, but I think that this activity needs to become a habit. There are few things that bother me more than sitting in an office and typing away at the computer, especially as an elected student representative.

CONCLUSION

The next two weeks will be more of the same: undergraduate research planning punctuated by meetings and random things that always seem to pop up. I look forward to your questions!

In solidarity,

-Emerson Csorba