

October 27th, 2015

To: Council

Re: VPA Report 12

Dear Council,

With the end of September and us being nearly halfway through October, we're closing in on the mid-point of the semester. I'm grateful for September's end, since it was jam-packed with events and meetings, and am finding more time to focus on my goals for the year.

Here is a report on my duties to date:

1. Academic Plan

I was hoping to have this passed along the Friday before Council, but instead I needed a bit more time to complete it after learning our dear friend on campus Evan Tran had passed away. I'll share a document for feedback with any members of Council wishing to review the draft Academic Plan submission before the end of this week.

2. Teaching Tenure Stream, Textbook Costs

I've gotten a great research update on the need for a teaching tenure stream, as well as how it has been implemented in about half of our university counterparts across the country. I'll be taking this to the Committee on the Learning Environment in the hopes that we can develop a subcommittee focused on, perhaps, a SWOT analysis of its implementation here at the U of A.

Our research department has also updated some of our facts around textbook costs and recent strategies at other Canadian universities to target the rising costs, as the last time an overview was done was 2008.

3. University Standing Committees

The Information Technology Advisory Committee met, where I learned that the University is considering a new software to help with grading and assessment in large classes without overloading fees onto students. The new software gives feedback to students faster than grading by hand, though comments on submitted work a bit generic as opposed to specific to what a student did. They're still in the pilot phase, but this looks like a project with a lot of potential for students.

4. General Faculties Council: ASC

GFC Facilities Development Committee was cancelled last week, so the Academic Standards Committee is the only GFC meeting I attended over the past two weeks. There wasn't anything eventful at this meeting, aside from new certificates for post-graduates in Education, as well as a new undergraduate certificate introduced in Business.



5. COFA: OASIS, NUA, PERCS, ISSS, MSWG

Lots of activity with Faculty Associations! Here we go:

OASIS (Arts) has finished up their transition for executives, and once their councilors are transitioned this week the organization will be ready to hit full speed. Discover Governance and I will have the organization be on probation for a full 365 days, simply because an organization hasn't been stable in Arts for a while and it will help Discover Governance assist wherever needed.

The SU Exec also met up with the Nursing Undergraduate Association, Physical Education and Recreation Council of Students, and Interdepartmental Science Students' Society. Meeting each FA one-on-one has been great so far, and each one has its own unique aspects: nursing students balancing practicums and rotations amongst duties on campus, physed students going through a new elections process, and science students responding to the needs of a large Faculty membership. I also thank the ISSS for providing us with study mentors able to volunteer and assist for Fall Reading Week!

COFA Member Services Working Group also met, where we checked in to see how September went, talked briefly about how to deal with office thefts, and then spent most of our time brainstorming how to partner with Unwind Your Mind to support mental health programming in their Faculties.

6. Governance Review Task Force

We had another effective governance review meeting, where we discussed transition for committee chairs in particular. From that discussion, we'll move to discussing when the first meeting of Council for newly elected members should take place, particularly if holding it in late March as opposed to late April would help transition for new members.

7. Miscellany

I had a meeting of the Academic Relations Group where we mainly discussed how our committee work was coming along, and also identified student space and textbook costs as a point of focus for the year. The SU Executives also met with University Relations to discuss our relationship with the City of Edmonton and housing by campus. We also received a brief presentation from the Dean of Students on the Helping Individuals at Risk program, and the proposed changes should go a long way out to more students who could be in distress. There was also a lunch event with the Board of Governors, where I got to know a few of the Board members.

Lastly, the SU Exec attended the memorial for Evan Tran executed by a number of volunteers, including VP Kwan. I'm hopeful the memorial gives us a bit of closure as we continue to mourn his loss, and I was impressed by the service provided by the Chaplains as well. I was reminded that grief is real, and something that must be embraced. I'm also grateful for the strength Evan's family has shown throughout this time, and for opening an important conversation around mental health.

In case anyone is ever feeling down, don't hesitate to reach out to myself or any of the services available. Rest in peace, Evan.

Fahim Rahman