



January 5th, 2016

To: Council

Re: VPA Report 15

Dear Council,

Welcome to 2016! I hope you've all had a great Winter break, and are all charged up for another semester before we go on break for the summer again.

Here is a report on my duties to date:

1. University Institutional Strategic Plan (ISP)

If you scroll through the [order papers](#) for today, you'll see a copy of our SU Submission to the Institutional Strategic Plan! I'm very thankful for the assistance I got from our UGAA and ECMA on editing the document, as well as the feedback from Students' Council, the GM and Executives.

I've sent a copy of the final document to President Turpin and Provost Dew, with the expectation that it will feed into the final document that the University produced as the Advisory Committee sees fit.

The majority of my month has been spent fine-tuning the SU submission, and working with other ISP committee members to narrow down the specific goals and strategic we intend to use on the themes identified to date. The conversations have been very enlightening, from how we as a campus should respond to the TRC to getting more experiential learning opportunities for students.

I'm currently involved with two subgroups focused on community engagement and the UAlberta narrative, and it's been super enlightening to see the things our University currently does and where it's planning on going with its resources and talent.

Maybe I've seen the light; maybe they put something in my water. But working on the ISP was been very pleasant and I hope the SU plays an important role in making the final document actually happen.

2. Teaching Quality: Teaching Tenure, Festival of Teaching

As the introduction of a teaching tenure stream will include labor discussions, I've set up a meeting with the Vice-Provost HR to gauge his opinion on the feasibility of a teaching tenure stream. At GFC Exec, I also posed a question to President Turpin about a teaching tenure stream as he oversaw one's introduction at UVic. He couldn't comment on implementation process as the Collective Agreement with AASUA was under arbitration, but he noted many other Canadian universities realized this is needed and he saw no reason not to go forward with a teaching tenure stream.

The Faculties of Medicine and Dentistry, ALES and FGSR are committed to running a mini-Festival of Teaching spotlight on their excellent instructors in late Winter term, which I'm sure will help expand the

Festival of Teaching. I'm currently working with University Marketing and Communications to prepare material for these events.

3. University Standing Committees

The Festival of Teaching Steering Committee was the only one that met last month, which I provided an update above. The time for the Festival has been set: the first Thursday and Friday of May. Try to catch parts of it if you're still on campus then!

I had three other ad-hoc working group meetings: one brief update on the Students' role with student groups, one with the two Vice Provosts (Academic Programs, and Learning Initiatives), and one around students paying for third party assessments. The third party assessment meeting was efficient, as some courses offer a better educational experience to students if they can afford particular software to do assignments, but there shouldn't be financial barriers towards success beyond tuition. The current policy of a cost-free assessment alternative must be provided to students who request it alleviates that burden, so there won't be changes to it.

With the two Vice Provosts, we discussed the SU Submission to the Institutional Strategic Plan, increasing eUSRI response rates, Fall Reading Week and eCampus Alberta.

4. General Faculties Council: CLE, Exec, ASC

GFC wound down a bit for the month of December. At CLE we had a thorough discussion of the change from paper to electronic end of course evaluations, and a sticking point for many members was the ~15% decrease in student response rates. This is a huge concern if response rates hit sub-50%, as instructors may value the feedback given less in the future. I'll work with the Vice-Provosts Learning Initiatives and Information Technology to see if we can prevent future drops in USRI response rates.

If any of you attended the joint GFC, BoG, Alumni Council and Senate retreat in late November, GFC Exec found it was productive to share ideas and information about the roles the governing bodies play. We thought it would be good to have a retreat like that at least once every two years. Exec also considered how to respond to calls for reviewing previous documents evaluating GFC and governance. It will come to the upcoming GFC meeting for discussion as part of a larger discussion on governance, and previous recommendations made will be sorted in terms of their impact and scope of change.

ASC also had some exciting parts. The Chair noted that the new Alberta government was interested in learning outcomes for students with new programs. There aren't any proposed changes now, but we should expect something along the lines of new guidelines for how programs demonstrate particular outcomes for graduates. The U of A is also looking at increasing their English Language Proficiency standards for international students, particularly the IELTS bands for admission, as many students in the lower bands of 5 are disproportionately requested to withdraw (RTW) from their program. I met with the International Students' Association to gauge their feedback on the potential change, and they supported it. Finally, ASC reviewed the large increase in course withdrawals ever since the date to withdraw was extended, which has corresponded with a decrease in RTWs assigned to all students.

5. COFA: ESA, OASIS, Senior Board

I met with the ESA VP Finance, which has had trouble in the past filling all of their seats on governance. One major factor in this happening is that many education students go on practicum, preventing them from participating in student groups in an executive role. The ESA may shift around their executive duties and workloads so that there is a natural break FA work once students go on practicum.

OASIS has approved the conditions of probation at their last executive meeting, so Discover Governance will be receiving monthly updates from OASIS now.

At COFA Senior Board, we didn't have the Provost come to solicit feedback on the ISP, but instead the President attended! COFA Senior Board's comments really centered around experiential learning, financial bursaries, fostering student participation in student group activities, student mentorship opportunities with faculty members, and a strategy for mental health.



We also had another President, Navneet Khinda, solicit feedback on her video space project from FAs. (You should ask her how the meeting went – she seemed pretty impressed with COFA from what I

heard.) Researchers from the Faculty of Education also introduced a project on graduate attribute assessment I'll elaborate on next. Lastly, we talked about how to balance commitments to classes and work while serving as a student representative, and checked in with our own energy left for the year.

6. Student Feedback

A few years back the University identified seven attributes all U of A students should have when they graduate (think critical thinking, collaboration, ethical responsibility). They've created an assessment tracker tool to be used at the beginning and end of any semester, which works by students filling out a two minute survey through eClass. It's a really neat project and they're looking for sign-ups, so visit gaat.csj.ualberta.ca for details and to sign up!

A number of Engineering students messaged me regarding their final exam schedule, where students wrote anywhere from three to five exams in a span of three days. There wasn't anything to be done outside of lending an ear and pointing out mental health services available as this semester's final exam schedule has been set, but the Registrar's Office was notified of the situation and will see if repeats like this can be avoided next semester.

I took a bit of time to review what I've learned about the position over the past four months and tracked the progress made over the various academic goals the portfolio has held over the past few years. I'm hopeful my successor finds it useful once transition begins in mid-March.

7. Miscellany

Playing in Campus Cup with friends was great; thanks VP Kwan for organizing our team! She also organized some wonderful sessions to give treats to students studying for finals on campus. I attended the Medical Students' Association Concert, which had incredible performances. Navneet organized a great team retreat, and I took the break to catch up on sleep, watched Disney's Star Wars 7 a few times, and planned out some of my life after graduation this year.

I'm currently 2nd in my hockey pool and 9 points **behind** 4th place, if anyone cares. (Perhaps another great question for question period...)

Thanks so much for your time, and looking forward to the next report.

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(Electronically submitted)