

# Vice-President Academic Report

Date: July 12 2011 meeting of Council

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## INTRODUCTION

Once again, I write this report as quite the busy VPA. The last two weeks have brought plenty of work, though it has been enjoyable. I hope that you take the time to take a close read at what I write, and then follow up the reading with analysis and thoughtful questions. As I have stated earlier, the pressures of the undergraduate research symposium and co-chair position in graduate attributes are mounting; however, there is more. Orientation 2011 is fast approaching. Because of the first-time involvement of faculty associations, Orientation will consume a large portion of my time. Additionally, I am proud to announce that the Canadian Nursing Student Association western regional conference is being hosted by the Nursing Undergraduate Association. Much like with Orientation, I am delighted to play a role in this event. Of note is the fact that Councillor Bellinger is playing a key role in the organization of this event.

## CANADIAN NURSING STUDENT ASSOCIATION – WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE (NUA)

From October 28-30, the NUA (the faculty association for the Faculty of Nursing) will be hosting the western regional conference for the CNSA. The NUA also hosted the conference in 2009, which was considered a huge success. Once again, the NUA has little time to organize the event, with less than four months until October 28. On July 6, Councillor Bellinger and I attended a meeting of ten students from the Faculty of Nursing. During this meeting, a substantial amount of planning for the conference took place, which was highlighted by the formal creation of the Regional Conference Planning Committee (RCPC). *Councillor Bellinger was selected as the Director of the RCPC, which is a significant task indeed.* He will lead the planning and implementation of the western regional conference, which is geared toward over one hundred students from the University of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Alberta, Calgary, and so on. Moreover, I will serve as the sponsorship chair of the RCPC executive committee. If you have any questions, please direct them to Councillor Bellinger or myself.

This event will take up some of my time, especially as I sit on the RCPC executive; however, I feel strongly that the VPA should be involved as much as possible with faculty associations. I think that it is one's duty to *try* to understand the culture of an organization, if this person has the power to make decisions that can profoundly affect the function of that organization.

Summary of CNSA – western regional conference:

- Councillor Bellinger is named director of conference
- Conference represents big opportunity for NUA, and students in Faculty of Nursing
- Solid group of a dozen volunteers to organize the conference and form the executive
- VPA to serve as sponsorship coordinator on the executive

## UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

Pressure is rapidly increasing for undergraduate research, and in particular, the symposium. What I have done is as follows: met consistently with the Academic Director of the Undergraduate Research Initiative and the Experiential Learning Coordinator of CAPS: Your Student Success Centre; drafted and continuously polished a terms of reference for the Students' Union Undergraduate Research Symposium Planning Committee; advertised the committee through the SU website (I have received many good applications thus far); commenced the development of a marketing campaign for the symposium; contacted close to twenty associate deans (mostly associate deans of research) to advertise the symposium to administration and students; drafted a preliminary package for sponsorship. Although this is already a good chunk of work, there is much left to do.

If you are interested in volunteering on this planning committee, then please contact me ASAP, as the committee will start to meet within the next two weeks.

Here are the keys to retain from the undergraduate research section:

- Intensity for undergraduate research work is mounting
- VPA contacted around twenty (20) associate deans (AD of research from nearly every university faculty) to involve them in the project
- If you want to sit on the committee, *it is critical that you contact me ASAP*
- Although the conference is slated for November, the planning must occur during the summer

## **GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES**

Much like undergraduate research, graduate attributes will only be successful if the VPA does the majority of the leg work during the summer. With the CLE subcommittee on attributes and competencies meeting during the week of July 26 2011, I have been hard at work finishing up a few different initiatives: drafting the initial version of the committee terms of reference, in conjunction with the SU Department of Research and Political Affairs; contacting potential members for the subcommittee; writing up and sending out the committee June 22 minutes; developing a consultation plan for undergraduate students; informing faculty associations, councillors and student services that they will be consulted prior to the end of the summer.

At some point in July, I hope to present specifically on graduate attributes. Now that councillors have a decent idea of the university's Academic Plan – and hopefully, of the Students' Union's Submission to the 2009 Academic Plan – I think that it is appropriate to delve into this subject in an in-depth manner. I will present the graduate attributes powerpoint that I presented at the 2011 Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education conference.

Although the consultation process has not yet begun, please think about the following questions: 1) *What does it mean to be a student in your specific faculty?* 2) *What does it mean to be a student at the University of Alberta?*

Here is the summary for the graduate attributes headline:

- CLE subcommittee terms of reference drafted, and calls for membership are being made
- I will present about graduate attributes at Council
- Start to think about the two philosophical questions listed in the paragraph above

## **ORIENTATION 2011 – FACULTY ASSOCIATIONS**

In April 2011, a joint ISSS/CBAS motion at the Council of Faculty of Associations asked the VPA to look into the possibility of including faculty associations in Orientation 2011, through the creation of 50 minute blocks for FA-specific presentations. Since May 2011, I have been working with the Assistant Manager of Orientation, Mr. Tim Ira, to involve FAs in Orientation and prepare a framework for successful planning. The ISSS, CBAS, ESS, and NUA have all accepted an invitation to participate in Orientation 2011, and two other FAs will soon provide a final decision. Each FA is in the process of planning a unique presentation, *which may include the VPA in a rap battle with certain FA executives*.

As September approaches, the Assistant Manager and VPA will be editing presentation plans and scripts, possibly preparing videos and participating in Orientation dress rehearsals. Overall, the FA involvement in Orientation serves as a good start to student engagement for the 1000+ incoming students that participate in Orientation.

If you retain anything from this section, let it be the following:

- VPA working with Assistant Manager of Orientation to involve FAs in September 6 events, following ISSS/CBAS CoFA motion
- ISSS, CBAS, ESS and NUA are all participating
- The VPA and Assistant Manager have prepared some planning documents for faculty associations running different sessions

## **STUDENT GOVERNANCE OFFICE**

On June 6 2011, I met with the Student Governance Advisor, Ms. Amanda Henry, and the Student Governance Officer, Ms. Giselle General, to brainstorm the Discovering Governance programming to occur in the fall semester. The one-hour meeting was highly productive, as we developed a global understanding of the major university and SU events taking place in the fall semester, clarified the schedule of GFC standing committee meetings during the semester, and selected many of the Discovering Governance materials that will be presented to various groups of students.

If you ever have questions regarding procedure for specific student or university governance-related issues, policies, bylaws, etc., please direct your questions to the Student Governance Advisor. Additionally, many of the materials being prepared by the SGA and SGO can ameliorate your ability to serve effectively as a student representative. If you aspire to serve on a faculty association executive, or as a Students' Union executive, then these materials are certainly worth using.

The student governance recap is as follows:

- VPA, SGA and SGO have set a preliminary fall semester schedule for the Discovering Governance programming
- Remember that the SGA and SGO exist to improve the effectiveness of student representatives
- If you are thinking of running for an executive position within the SU, this office's materials could be of great use in your preparation

## **FALL READING WEEK TASK FORCE**

On July 7 2011, I co-chaired the third meeting of the Fall Reading Week Task Force. The meeting went well, as the committee discussed logistical options that play into the potential creation of a fall reading week. When the President returns from vacation, he will assume the co-chair position, along with the University Registrar.

Summary:

- Third meeting of FRW TF was auspicious, with VPA serving as co-chair

## **POLICY COMMITTEE – RESEARCH POLITICAL POLICY**

I recently brought research political policy amendments to the policy committee. The goal of the amendments was to clarify some of the wording, and reflect some of the VPA undergraduate research goals for the upcoming year.

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Students' Union shall endeavour to ensure that the University of Alberta values the totality of research undertaken within the institution; and*

This policy change reflects the need to prioritize funding for all faculties on campus. At the moment, the natural sciences receive a substantial amount of funding, which is certainly auspicious for the university. Still, the social sciences and humanities sometimes lag behind in terms of funding. When I write “totality of research,” I mean that both applied and fundamental researches are critical to the University of Alberta. Research that occurs in the Faculty of Arts certainly differs from research that takes place in the Faculty of Engineering, but the two types of research cannot be viewed in isolation.

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Students' Union shall endeavour to ensure that the University of Alberta contextualizes research in a manner that maximizes the quality of higher education within the institution.*

The second principle provides what I hope is a clearer wording of the deleted political policy principle. Simply put, research at the University of Alberta is simply one thing that happens on campus. Although it is integral to the university, it must be viewed from a more general lens. For instance, research should not detract from teaching. Rather, it should reflect the university's vision, and if possible, improve – or at the very least, not hinder – teaching.

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Students' Union advocates for increased student and faculty awareness of undergraduate research opportunities at the University of Alberta.*

Although opportunities for undergraduate research do exist on campus, they are sometimes not visible to students. The Students' Union needs to advocate for improve awareness of undergraduate research, through initiatives such as Yaffle, funding for the Undergraduate Research Symposium, and inclusion of a professor research interest paragraph on the syllabus.

Summary:

- Three political policies were drafted, and recommended in first reading by the policy committee to Council
- The policies pertain to valuing the totality of research on campus, the contextualization of research within the university, and enhanced awareness of undergraduate research opportunities

## **FACULTY ASSOCIATION MEETINGS – ISSS, CBAS and NUA**

Over the last two weeks, I have attended meetings of the Interdepartmental Science Students' Society, the Collective Body of Arts Students, and the Nursing Undergraduate Association. Each of these meetings has been quite enjoyable. Attending FA meetings is something that I feel the VPA should do, for a number of reasons: 1) by attending meetings, one can better understand an FA's unique culture; 2) the VPA can learn about key FA issues and also update FAs about key SU issues; 3) in order to make sound decisions that may involve FAs, the VPA should understand the nuances of particular FAs.

Here are a few highlights from each meeting:

ISSS Council meeting: the VP Community's COSSA report was simply astounding. This approximately 15-page document was jaw-dropping in terms of quality.

CBAS Board meeting: the consensus decision making culture was intriguing, with the notable focus on maintaining positive vibes during meetings.

NUA-CNSA meeting: highly-productive meeting, where much of the first stage of CNSA planning was hashed out.

And now the section summary:

- VPA attended ISSS, CBAS and NUA meetings
- By attending these meetings, the VPA is gradually developing a better understanding of unique FA cultures

## **SOCIAL MEDIA: TWITTER AND BLOGGING**

On the SU website blog, I wrote a post entitled "The two-month mark: thoughts up to this point" (June 30 2011), and on June 24, I wrote a post called "Pace: A Theme for the Year" (June 24 2011). When you have time, I would be grateful if you took the time to read the blogs and then provide comments to me. I am attempting to write about VPA-specific issues, like assessment and grading, but also more general thematic issues that affect student representatives in general. Your feedback will guide what I write in the future.

Summary:

- Read SU executive blog posts when times permits
- Provide feedback to VPA in order to inform what he writes over the next months

## **SERVICES VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE 2011-2012 (SVEC)**

For the first time in SU services history, some executives (the VPA and VPSL in particular) will be sitting on SVEC, which organizes the SU Volunteer Christmas Party and SU [No] Talent Show, among other initiatives. I had the opportunity to attend the committee's first meeting of the year, where I served as the secretary, taking minutes. My hope is to help lead professional development activities, which will be run by SVEC for SU volunteers.

Summary:

- Some SU executives will serve on SVEC in 2011-2012
- VPA will help run professional development events for SU volunteers

## **RUNNING FOR VICE-PRESIDENT ACADEMIC IN 2012-2013**

Although only two months have passed since the beginning of the 2011-2012 term, it is not too early to start thinking about running for Vice-President Academic. I highly recommend that you consider running for VPA, as it has come with incredible learning experiences, and the summer is not even over. The VPA in 2012-2013 will serve as co-chair of the CLE subcommittee on attributes and competencies, which is potentially one of the university's most important long-term projects. Moreover, the importance of undergraduate research will continue to mount, and other interesting aspects of the 2011-2015 Academic Plan will be implemented.

Summary:

- If you are considering running for VPA in February/March 2012, please come and talk with me
- It is not too early to think about running for the SU executive
- Some key VPA issues for the future are graduate attributes and undergraduate research, along with other components of the 2011-2015 Academic Plan. The sky is the limit.

## **CONCLUSION**

As you can see, the last two weeks have been hectic – and there is little to no let-up. Undergraduate research, graduate attributes and Orientation will continue to be key issues throughout the rest of the summer, as there are due dates for symposium planning, graduate attributes plan consultation and Orientation faculty association collaboration that simply cannot be ignored. If you have made it this far in the report, good job, and I look forward to answering your questions.

In solidarity,

Emerson Csorba  
Vice-President Academic, Students' Union