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OFFICE OF THE

**Vice PresidentStudent Life**

**Date:** 7/21/2021

**To:** Students’ Union Council

**Re:** Vice President Student Life 2021/22 Report #11

Hi everyone!

As you probably guessed, the past two weeks have been very hectic for the exec. I hope you had a less intense week and are getting to enjoy the first few weeks of classes despite our little online scare! Here are some of the things I have been working on. **Please note that I talk about sexual violence on the last page, so feel free to skip that if you need to**.

Advocating for Improvements to the Academic Accommodations

As many of you know, I use academic accommodations, and I’ve always been passionate about improving them. In the last couple of weeks, Abner and I have started advocating for these changes, particularly as some have been negative changes to the program. Here are some of the things we have been working on:

*We conducted a PERKs survey to learn more about students experiences with Academic Accommodations*. You can find the survey results [here](https://www.su.ualberta.ca/governance/advocacy/research/). Now that we have this info, we can advocate for effective change.

*We met with Helen from DOS and told her about the changes that need to be made*. She was very receptive. We talked about developing a strategy for improving Academic Accommodations over the next year by conducting surveys, focus groups, and working with experts.

*Advocated for immediate changes to Academic Accommodations that were changed due to COVID.* There have been two big changes to academic accommodations. The first is that they got rid of the note-taking service. This was a service that provided students with access to notes that they cant write themselves. We have advocated for this service to be reinstated immediately. There were also issues with proctoring and communications about the changes, we have asked for communications to be sent out this week clarifying the changes.

Advocating for increased mental health supports

This month we’ve ramped up mental health advocacy. I have met with folks in residence about creating new and exciting programming in partnership with the PSC and the COVID Rapid Response Collaborative. Hopefully, I will be able to update you all soon about the new and exciting things to come!

Advocating Sexual Violence Prevention Efforts

Since May, I have been pursuing avenues to improve prevention efforts at the university and support for survivors. Sadly it’s been an uphill battle. I wanted to give a big update about some key things we have been advocating for:

*The hiring of the Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator*. As many of you know, students are currently paying for this position. When I started as VPSL I was told that the position would be hired by August, but the university has been dragging its feet. Since May, myself and Rowan have been pushing the university to speed up the process. Last week on Monday, we sent a very strongly worded email to Wendy Rodgers and again got no updates. Finally, after a survivor came forward this week on Wednesday (I speak about that at the end of my report), we were told they would prioritise the hiring and tentatively promised it for October. It is disheartening that it took someone speaking publicly about their assault for movement to be made.

*Creating a mandatory sexual violence training program*. The creation of this program was part of my platform. We applied for a grant that would give us the money to hire a person who could develop this program for the university. Unfortunately, we didn’t get the grant. We are currently in the process of identifying and applying for other grants that could meet our needs.

*Increasing access to supports for survivors.* This is a project that hasn’t gotten much attention yet. We are now working to finalise a website that would allow for safe disclosure, connect people with resources and support survivors. We are also working to create reporting guides for students from different backgrounds and whose first language is not English.

*Finishing the Experiential Learning Policy*. Abner and I have been working on finalizing this process since May and have found it incredibly challenging. We are working with University admin to finish this policy.

*Advocating for changes to the collective agreement*. The AASUA collective agreement provides lots of protects to academic staff accused of sexual assault. We are advocating for changes to this agreement to provide more supports to students.

Content Warning: Sexual Assault

This week a survivor of sexual violence made a [public appeal](https://www.instagram.com/p/CT134B5FiD2/) to the University and the UASU last week. The survivor has disclosed that they were assaulted by Ricardo Acuña, a University of Alberta professor and President of the Association of Academic Staff of the University of Alberta (AASUA). The UASU has also learned that Oxfam recently removed Acuña as the chair of the Oxfam Canada Board and a member of the Oxfam International Board due to allegations of sexual misconduct. We believe survivors. We are working with the survivor to get justice and provide support. We are also calling on Acuña to resign as AASUA President and as Executive Director of the University’s Parkland Institute. If he doesn’t step down, we are asking that he is removed from these positions.

Best,

Talia Dixon

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University of Alberta Students’ Union Vice President Student Life

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2-900 SUB | 780 492 4241 | talia.dixon@su.ualberta.ca