

November 1st, 2012

To: Students' Council

Re: Report to Students' Council (for November 6th, 2012 Meeting)

1. The Future of Alberta's Post-Secondary Education System Conference

For the past two weeks and for the rest of my term, I will focus a lot of my efforts on organizing a conference based on the Future of Alberta's Post-Secondary Education System. This conference has been picking up a lot of ground but still has a tremendous amount of work today with an especially tight time frame (approximately 3.5 months).

In addition to have meetings with both the Steering (eight members from all of the organizations from other undergraduate and graduate student organizations in Alberta) and "Executive" (three members from each organization, including myself) committee every week, I've been heading a lot of the progress by drafting not only the conference's visioning document but its sponsorship package.

Furthermore, I've been working with the Students' Union's (SU) General Manager and its Programming and Venues Manager to start working out the details and logistics behind actually organizing the conference. A big outcome from this was a tentative budget to work off of.

Last week, I also had the opportunity to meet with the University of Alberta's University Relations – its Vice President and a Senior Administrator. Both of them expressed serious interest in assisting with the conference's delivery and being a serious stakeholder in the conference. However, a more solid proposal is needed to further convince them and the rest of the University's administration to seriously assist with the conference, i.e. provide funding and free space for the conference.

In addition to the University administration expressing excitement in this conference and needing a sponsorship proposal to provide funding, the Ministry of Enterprise and Advanced Education (MEAE) has also expressed both things. Last week, I also talked with one of the MEAE's Managers and the Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) primarily in-charge of post-secondary education (PSE) and they were ecstatic about hosting such a conference.

2. Market Modifiers + Elections Act + Property Tax

While I was talking to one of the ADMs in the MEAE last week about the conference, we also chatted about rumors of graduate students having a \$2,000 tuition increase via a market modifier. The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) has been lobbying extensively for the past couple of years to close the market modifiers loophole so when we heard these rumors we immediately started any kind of advocacy efforts – from raising this issue to the MEAE in-person to collaborating with the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) on developing strategies. On October 19th, I did an interview with the Gateway's April Hudson about it and an excellent article was produced as a result ("Grad students may see \$2,000 market modifier increase" – October 24th) – of which I was quoted in nearly half of it. The ADM cited this article during our chat and assured me that this was just an unfeasible idea that the University administration was floating around. I consider this a "mini-win" here.

Another "win" that we're expecting is the Elections Act changing. We keep hearing from everybody that the section in the Elections Act that specifically singles-out students will be "changed". The question is

how much will it be changed? We're afraid that instead of completely removing the section that singles-out students that the section will be rewritten in another way. Either way, we're quite pleased to hear that some sort of change is coming all the way from all parties.

In regards to property taxes, this has picked up some excitement recently. Our partners at the University of Lethbridge met with their Member of the Legislative Assembly, Associate Minister Greg Weadick, to talk about this issue and he gave some great strategic advice on how to approach this. Furthermore, he gave a hint that there was some political traction in favor of us with this priority. However, during our meeting with the Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education, Minister Stephen Khan, his Chief of Staff indicated to us that we needed to do a significantly better job in collaborating with not only our respective municipalities but municipalities all over the province that has student residences. Now that the Alberta Student Executive Council (ASEC) is also lobbying on this issue, there is great opportunity for us to work together on this issue. With increased traction, I've been working with the SU's Advocacy Director to draft a (belated) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the University's Facilities and Operations. That way students can ensure that if property taxes ever get eliminated, the saved costs would go straight into deferred maintenance for residences.

3. CAUS LobbyCon + CAUS Budget Submission Document

This week, CAUS had the opportunity to do a mini-LobbyCon where we spent a day to meet with all political parties to present not only our yearlong priorities but also our newly produced budget submission document. Our budget submission document asks for changing the Access to the Future Fund to focus solely on matching scholarship and bursary donations for students instead of infrastructure for our PSE institutions, increasing open data on PSE statistics/figures, and ensuring that the Progressive Conservative's (PC) adhere to their campaign promise for a \$17 million grant for Aboriginal and Rural students being implemented in 2013.

Colten and the others had the chance to meet with a slew of Wildrose MLAs, including its Leader. I had the opportunity to meet with Kent Hehr, the Liberal Party's PSE critic. We had an extremely spirited conversation and a lot of our points were well received for the most part. After that, we had lunch in the Legislature's cafeteria, ran into a bunch of MLAs and staffers, and got introduced at the Legislature.

To conclude our day, we met with Minister Khan, the MEAE ADM primarily in charge of PSE, his Chief of Staff, and his Communications staffer. We had a surprisingly lengthy meeting (one hour) that covered a range of topics. Furthermore, we had debate on a variety of issues and the Minister encouraged us to draft what we think would be a fair consultative framework in regards to mandatory non-instructional fees. (Which I personally have very mixed feelings about...) At the end of the day, the meeting went pretty good for the most part, but a long six-month wait to formally meet with him is still unreasonable.

4. Politically Active Groups + External Advocacy Team

Great strides have been taken to work towards my goal of creating a network of politically active student groups on campus by meeting with numerous student group executives. These newly formed relationships have already paid off – from finding ways to collaborate in hosting politicians on campus to getting unique opportunities to attend numerous political functions at no cost. I plan on hosting a mixer between all of these executives sometime this semester to give these groups the chance to not only

network with myself but to build relationships with other groups on campus and, thereby, create a more politically engaged campus.

Additionally, this weekend (Sat, November 3rd) the Vice President Academic and myself will host a comprehensive advocacy training session. The attendance numbers look relatively good for the most part. During the external advocacy portion of the day, I not only plan on giving participants the opportunity to take part in lobby simulations but they'll also hear some wise words from the past Leader of Alberta's Opposition and the Liberal Party, Kevin Taft!

5. PC and Wildrose AGM

As mentioned in my previous reports, this year I plan on familiarizing myself with members of all political parties by attending their respective AGMS & Conventions as an apolitical observer – something that other provincial undergraduate and graduate lobby organizations commonly do. A while back, I attended the NDP's AGM. The PC and Wildrose AGM are both in November, so it should be an exciting month for politicking.

Signing off,



Petros Kusmu

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