

August 14th, 2012

To: Students' Council

Re: Report to Students' Council (for August 14th, 2012 Meeting)

Introduction

Hello Council! It feels good to be back! In case you haven't noticed, I've been in Eritrea visiting family and friends from July 28th to August 13th. Not only did I have the opportunity to revitalize myself, but I had the opportunity to further reflect and work on the creation of an external advocacy team and a conference on the future of post-secondary education (PSE) in Alberta.

As a result, I don't have much to report on besides what happened from July 24th to 27th. Furthermore, I promised Council a comprehensive conference report on the Canadian Alliance of Student Association's (CASA) Policy and Strategy (P&S) Conference last meeting, so I'll attach it to this report. This report will also include a general overview of CASA, P&S, and how CASA chooses its lobby priorities – much of which has been taken from from last year's P&S report.

Before I jump into this I just want to give much props to all of the Executives, 2-900 staff, and LHSA for their hard work over the past couple of weeks in regards to Lister. When I left, I figured this issued would've been resolved by the time I got back. Boy was I wrong. All of the Listerites, Councillors, students, and alumni who have been helping out also deserve many props. Good work, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Executive Summary:

1. On July 25th, the Ministry of Enterprise and Advanced Education (MEAE) hosted a Government Orientation for the provincial student lobby organizations. It was an excellent opportunity to meet with Minister Stephen Khan, the rest of the Ministry, and other student leaders from across the province. Forming these relationships is crucial to my portfolio.

1. Government Orientation

On July 25th, the Ministry of Enterprise and Advanced Education (MEAE) hosted a Government Orientation for the provincial student lobby organizations – Alberta Student Executive Council (ASEC), Alberta Graduate Council (AGC), and the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) – in the lovely Government House at the Royal Alberta Museum. We kicked off the day with an appearance and speech by Minister Stephen Khan and his Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) David Morhart. After introducing ourselves with the ASEC, AGC, and the MEAE staff, we started off with presentations and a Q&A on each lobby organization. It was great hearing what the other groups are working on and it was nice seeing some similarities amongst our lobby priorities – such as, on mandatory non-instructional fees (MNIFs). Q&A with the Ministry was also great. The Ministry brought up that the Albertan government is currently developing a Youth Workforce Strategy (YWS). I sent couple of follow-up emails the day after Orientation and now have a meeting with one of the YWS' policy analysts being arranged. This will work great in regards to my student work programs priority, since this meeting will be a good chance to not only get more information on STEP for the Advocacy Department's research but it'll be a good opportunity to highlight PSE students in the creation of the YWS.

After the Q&A, lunch was provided – i.e. an opportunity to network with other student executives around the province and (more importantly) the MEAE's staff. After lunch, there were three breakout sessions that was hosted by different staff from the Ministry – Campus Alberta, Learner Pathways, and Student Aid Alberta. These breakout sessions not only educated us student leaders on what these different areas are working on, but it was a fantastic opportunity to provide the staff who were directly working on these initiatives some feedback from the student perspective, which was very welcomed and appreciated. While it would've been nicer if Minister Khan and the ADM could've spent more than the morning with us at Government Orientation, at the end of the day it was still a fantastic opportunity. Lots of good relationships with the Ministry and other lobby organizations have been made as a result.

2. Outings

Here's a list of some of my past and upcoming outings.

1. ~~CAUS – Meeting in Edmonton – July 25th~~
2. CAUS – Meeting in Calgary – August 21st
3. CASA – Board Retreat in Ottawa, Ontario – August 25th-27th

Signing off,



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August 14th, 2012

To: Students' Council

Re: Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) Policy and Strategy (P&S) Conference Report (for August 14th, 2012 Students' Council Meeting)

Introduction

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) is a federal lobby group with 26 member institutions. CASA is a member-driven organization that meets at least 3 times annually. The first meeting is CASA Policy and Strategy (P&S) conference, this is where CASA sets its lobbying, research and policy goals for the year. The next meeting is CASA Lobby Conference (LobbyCon), this is where CASA meets in Ottawa to lobby Members of Parliament on the priorities we set in P&S, usually in November. And finally CASA Annual General Meeting or (AGM), usually in March, there CASA makes any final changes or recommendations that came for the committees' year worth of work.

This year P&S was held during Tuesday July 17th through Saturday July 21st. The President, the Director of Research and Political Affairs, and I attended. P&S is arguably the most important of all meetings for CASA, as it is the meeting where each member institution gets to lobby all the members of CASA on their own goals.

In this Report, I will go through everyday of the conference and I will highlight major aspects of the week.

1. Tuesday July 17th

This day was mostly used for registration, check in, and meeting some of the other delegates – which was especially nice since it was the first time that us Western delegates had the opportunity to meet with other delegates from Eastern and Central Canada. In the evening, a Pecha Kucha event was hosted where delegates had a couple of minutes to present themselves. As usual, the University of Alberta Students' Union (UASU) left a lasting impression with our presentation.

2. Wednesday July 25th

The day started bright and early with breakfast at 8AM and Opening Plenary at 9AM, where we approved some basic items to get the conference going – e.g. approve agenda, minutes, a speaker, and minute taker. After that, the CASA staff presented to the membership an overview of the issues highlighted at the various regional CASA transitions prior to P&S in March and June.

At 11:30AM, CASA's Government Relations Officer – Rob LeForté – gave a presentation on the Political Year Ahead. During his overview of federal political climate of the year, he continually reiterated that the government's big focus is combatting unemployment. This really underscored why lobbying for greater investments in student work programs was a great idea.

After lunch, a presentation on "Who do we represent" was given by an undergraduate, graduate, and

apprenticeship delegate. The day ended off with a “Partners Panel”. This panel consisted of representatives from similarly aligned provincial groups to discuss what they’re working on and share best practices. Duncan Wojtaszek, CAUS’ Executive Director, came to P&S to co-present with Raphael Jacob, CAUS’ Chair and U of C SU’s VPX, on CAUS and to network with other provincial lobby organizations from across the nation. It was great hearing what other groups are working on, such as, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance’s (OUSA) new report on how the Ontarian government can better the quality of instruction at universities. Furthermore, some delegates were interested in hosting a similar Get Out the Vote campaign to ours, such as, the University of Prince Edward Island’s Students’ Union.

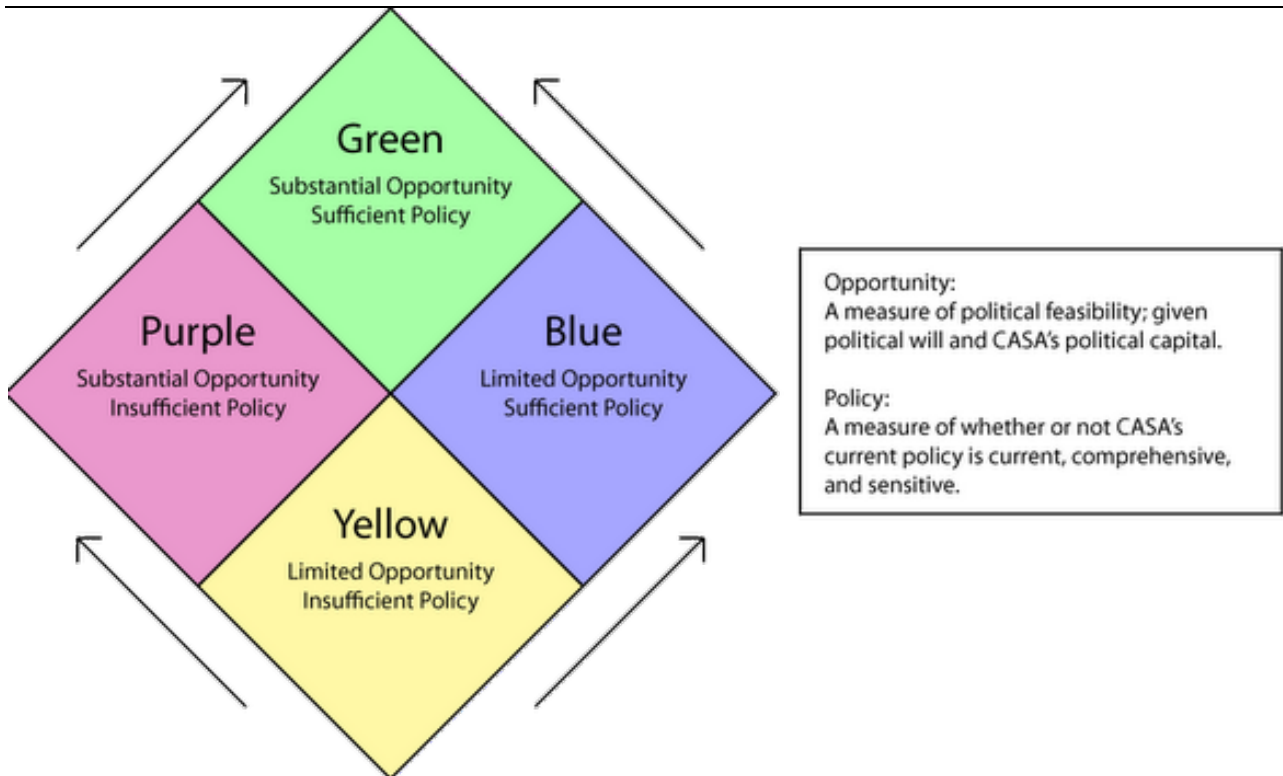
The provincial lobby organizations that attended were:

- Alberta Students’ Executive Council (ASEC)
- Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations (ANSSA)
- College Student Alliance (CSA an Ontario based Alliance)
- Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS, UASU is a part of that)
- Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA another Ontario based Alliance)
- New Brunswick Student Alliance (NBSA)
- Representatives from Prince Edward Island

2. Thursday July 26th

For those of us who were interested in a having board position or chairing a CASA committee, our day started off at 8AM with an overview of what are the different roles and responsibilities with each of the different positions available. At the time, I was extremely interested in running for Chair, so this was helpful in seeking out the rest of the competition.

After this presentation, we began the day with a “New Asks” presentation in which the Policy and Research Officer explained how CASA delegates would establish our priorities for the year. The Policy Development Framework is the name of the whole framework CASA applies to develop its policies and advocacy priorities over the course of one year. At the centre of the framework is “the ask”: what CASA would like to the government do. Perhaps the most important part of lobbying is “the ask”. Weak asks will never move through the process of government. The goal of the P&S conference is to take a bunch of ideas, transform them into asks (definition), have the membership decide on which of those asks constitute the top priorities for the year (prioritization), and then assess how CASA should work on those prioritized asks during the year (strategization). For example increasing access for First Nations population is a good idea, but not a strong ask. Transforming that into increasing funding for the Post Secondary Student Support Program by removing the 2% cap on funding is the transformation of the idea into an ask. The organization tracks its priorities and workflow through what is known as the priority diamond.



Items placed in the purple and yellow quadrants become the priority of policy. Items placed in the green and blue quadrants become the priority of government relations and communications. The ultimate goal of the diamond is to promote asks in to the green quadrant using policy and research (from purple to green), by harnessing appetite for an ask (from blue to green) or both (from yellow to green.) Items in the green quadrant are deemed the most ready to be enacted on by government, and become the focal point of the lobby conference. This year CASA decided to have 6 asks per quadrant. Obviously not all 24 asks will be lobbied on, only the 6 in the green quadrant. However if there's any time where a specific ask is talked about in Ottawa CASA we'll have a specific line to walk.

Before P&S, CASA didn't provide a list of the initial asks. Instead, issue and research briefs were prepared on the various lobby ideas that were raised at the different regional transitions. There was a total of 51 initial asks that all delegates had to vote on. The topics included:

- International Students,
- Vocational Training,
- Labour, First Nations,
- Métis, Inuit, Taxation,
- Education Costs,
- Infrastructure,
- Intellectual Property,
- Research,
- Federal-Provincial Relations,
- Mental Health,
- Student Financial Assistance, and
- Other

Some of the SU's main lobby priorities going into P&S (that's reflective of the Political Policies that direct me):

- Eliminating parental income contribution from the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP),
- Allowing for a single vehicle to be exempted from the CSLP asset assessment,
- Advocate for international students in regards to the elimination of the \$150 work visa fee and securing multiple entry visas,
- Removing book importation regulations on textbooks, and
- Advocating for increased investments into student work programs.

The last two lobby priorities were ones of great particular interest to me. There was no limit to the amount of votes we can cast on the ballot. The President and I reached consensus on every single point on the ballot. It is worth noting that The U of A did not limit our votes to our six priorities, we voted on asks that we supported as well. For example, the asks concerning lowering the student loan interest rate was something we voted on.

After voting, 24 asks were chosen from the list of 51. All of the 24 asks included our lobby priorities. However, CASA delegates spent a couple of hours later to assess where each ask belonged on the Diamond. The final result was as follows:



Unfortunately, not all of our asks made it to the green square (this year's asks) but I'm relatively content. My biggest disappoint was the removal of book importation regulations on textbooks (i.e. "Allowing parallel importation of books") being placed in the last square. Why? A couple of reasons. Firstly, it was made aware to us that after the federal government deals with the various rules, regulations, and enforcements of the recently approved copyright act early in the fall, there is really not much of an opportunity for us to lobby on this throughout the year. Secondly, Heritage Canada recently published a 100+ page report on Canada's book importation regulations that contended that the regulation had little to no inflationary effect on the Canadian list prices of textbooks, meaning that we'd have to find a different reason to argue against the regulation. Thirdly, despite this lobby ask not being a lobby priority CASA's staff and its delegates can still continue to lobby for it outside of its annual Lobby Conference meaning that we'll still be fighting for this ask in the background.

In regards to lobby priorities for international students, that also was another disappointment. When discussing about the various asks, it was made clear to us that the last year's asks for international students (i.e. elimination of \$150 work visa fee and ensuring multiple entry visas) had very little to no traction, especially after CASA's staff met with the relevant bureaucrats that dealt with this in particular.

However, a really interesting lobby idea relating to international students was raised: “the government make it easier for students to obtain permanent residency”. I’ll be sure to further investigate this idea this year so that hopefully it’ll ripe enough for next year’s CASA’s delegates to make this a priority.

Advocating for increased investments to student work programs (i.e. “Expanding the Canada Summer Jobs program”) elicited mixed emotions. For starters, I was disappointed that it didn’t make it to the green square since I felt like there was a tremendous amount of momentum for it and the other members felt so too (especially after Rob’s Political Climate presentation). But at the same time, I was quite shocked with how close this was to being a lobby priority, since I originally expected it to be one for CASA next year. What prevented this from being in the green square? The fact that CASA didn’t have an up-to-date political policy in support of this and some extra research. After learning about this, I was informed that if all the right steps were taken, it’d possible to propose this new political policy at CASA’s next meeting (mid-November) and start lobbying on this as soon as this year during our Lobby Conference in November.

3. Friday July 27th

Closing Plenary:

After the “Policy and Strategy” portion was done, CASA held a closing plenary (i.e. meeting). This is where we voted on the CASA Board of Directors, committee members and chairs. I ran for Chair for CASA against two other delegates – both of which are returning, one of which had experience on the board and was the host university for P&S. Unfortunately my bid was unsuccessful since the odds were stacked against me. However, I did score a spot on the Board by being a Director-at-Large, which I think is an even better opportunity.

Here are some Highlights:

- Budget for 2011-2012 was approved
- Pat Joyce, President of Mount Royal University Students’ Association, was elected Chair of CASA Board of Director (Chris Saulnier’s successor)
- Amanda Nielson, President of the Athabasca Graduate Student Association, was elected Secretary of CASA board of Director
- Brady Schnell, Vice-President Finance at the University of Lethbridge Students’ Union, was elected Treasurer of CASA Board of Directors
- CASA’s F05 Committee (Policy to Fund Upfront Grants with PSE Tax credits) was struck again with a slightly different purpose after the general membership voted against the suspension of policy F05 and was given a deadline to come up with a recommendation by LobbyCon (I sit on this committee again)
- CASA Annual General Meeting will be held at the University of British Columbia in Halifax

4. Saturday July 28th

This day was dedicated to delegates simply discussing issues that aren’t necessarily relevant to federal lobbying. Since this was an optional day, not all of the delegates were present. However, the talks were still very insightful as other delegates talked about how they are facing similar challenges to us abroad. Some of the things discussed were about public transit, local food security, Board of Governor roles,

student governance structures, and etc. At the end, we all agreed that this was relatively useful and would like to follow-up with it more in the future.

Future Recommendations

VPX:

As my predecessor reiterated to me during my transition, CASA P&S is one of the most important conferences for the Vice President (External) to attend when it comes to federal lobbying. Attendance alone is not adequate, the VPX must set aside some time to prepare for P&S. Preparations could start as soon as CASA transitions are over. Simple things like reading a CASA policy from time to time, and contacting CASA home office for any questions before. During the conference itself, the VPX will learn a great deal about CASA, however the more one prepares the more likely U of A priorities get adopted as CASA priorities. Once at the conference I suggest that the VPX starts sharing their priorities with other member school delegates. This way if there's a priority that is popular among all the members (for example Copyright), the VPX need not to worry about "selling" their idea. And if there is an unpopular priority (for example Undergraduate Research), the VPX can start getting other CASA delegates to become familiar and comfortable with the ask, that will ease the process of getting them to vote for your priorities.

The process of setting CASA priorities is likely to change from year to year, as CASA's institutional memory is still young. Last year's advice to me was to ask as many questions to CASA home office about how we set our priorities before attending the conference.

My advice to future VPXs to walk in to P&S with a very clear idea of what you want your goals exactly to be. For me, I had three goals that I felt quite passionate about: Chairing CASA, textbook import regulation removal, and student work programs. However, I felt relatively unsure and unprepared at times when it came to picking some other lobby priorities. This isn't only a result of CASA's often frustrating methodology in choosing its goals, but as a result of me not thinking more broadly enough of what I wanted from P&S.

DRPA:

The Director of Research and Political Affairs (DRPA)'s attendance is extremely valuable. Many of the asks presented by other member schools were not clear, and so the DRPA assisted in clarifying those ideas. The DRPA is also great for letting the VPX and President know what CASA has accomplished in previous years with regards to a specific ask or policy. During Plenary the DRPA's role becomes integral, by giving the VPX sober and unbiased facts about some of the discussions and debates that occur around the table. Many of the successes the U of A achieved this year were due to the support of the DRPA

President:

The role of the President will change from year to year. This year, Colten was absolutely integral in helping me campaign for Chair and for Director-at-Large. The role of support the president plays is indispensable. For every vote or decision made by the U of A, both the President and VPX reached

consensus, after having a discussion sometimes. This system will help ensure that the U of A Students' Union is representing their students fairly.