

Report to Students' Council

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To: Students' Council

Introduction

Hello everybody! Let me start off by saying that I'm beyond excited for Council this year. Not only are all the other executives great, but this year it seems as though we've got a high caliber of Students' Councillors. Anyways, hope finals went good for all of you. Unfortunately, this semester proved to be extremely difficult for me as I was finishing up my combined honors program. As a result, I had to cut back my commitments—one of which was some volunteer time with Get Out the Vote (GOTV) and transition time with the out-going Vice-President (External) (Farid Iskandar). Nonetheless, here's my report!

1. Transition

As mentioned above, I had to prioritize my academics the later half of the semester. However, things have been going good so far. Throughout the several transition meetings I've had with Farid, I've continued to learn a lot more on how to "make plays". (Within 2-900, this is a popular catch phrase that was coined by past-VPSL and President Nick Dehod. It essentially means taking strategic actions.) Our discussions have covered a lot, *inter alia*, on the structure of 2-900 (i.e. the Students' Union) and our provincial and federal lobby groups (CAUS and CASA), understanding the working dynamics behind these organizations, and the potential challenges that'll be coming up this year. In spite of all of this, Farid and I will be going through intensive transition sessions for the next couple of days. Also, it helps that he'll be around during the summertime and next year.

2. Lobby-Con

In addition to the rich discussions Farid and I have had during our transition (normally over a beer in RATT—yes, I'll continue to call it that), I've also had the great chance to get some firsthand experience with being VP (External) a week and half after I got elected. Our provincial lobby group, Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS), had its "LobbyCon" from March 19th-21st (Mon-Wed). During this lobby conference, our partners from the students unions at the University of Calgary and Lethbridge drove up to Edmonton and we had a plethora of meetings with various MLAs and Ministers on how to do post-secondary education better in Alberta. Some highlights:

- I acquainted myself with the incoming- and outgoing-executives from our partner schools.

- I had scheduled meetings with MLAs Len Mitzel, Doug Elniski, Guy Boutillier, and Paul Hinman and Ministers Cal Dalls, Hector Goudrea, and Greg Weadick (Minister of Advanced Education and Technology). Despite two of these meetings being cancelled, it was a blast. (Fun Tid-Bit: One of the MLAs were involved with the controversial “no-meet” committee pay issue and the speculations were running high of Premier Alison Redford calling an election). Nonetheless, it was an enriching, exciting, and awesome experience.
- Got a neat tour of the Legislature and had a blast at Question Period, where the Leader of the Official Opposition at the time (Raj Sherman–Liberal) and his other party members were hammering the government on post-secondary education issues. (This was a huge win considering that Question Period has recently been centered on the current state of Alberta’s health care system.)

This was my first time actually in legislature. It was odd walking in for the first time since I’m normally outside of it protesting for some cause or another. Anyways, I hope to share this experience with not only Councillors but with the general student population through various programs of engagement. This was a campaign point of mine and it’s something I’m quite passionate. Nonetheless, I’ll speak more about it next time. (And I’ll most definitely be soliciting thoughts and feedback on it soon from all of you.)

3. Get Out the Vote! (GOTV)

As most of you know, I’ve also been helping out with the GOTV campaign here and there–quite extensively when the elections began but I had to cut back my involvement since my grades needed some TLC near the end. Anyways, it was a blast putting some of my campaign promises into action as I had the chance to reach out and engage students (who already aren’t extensively engaged with the SU) with GOTV. Also, some media outlets interviewed me, which was another nice way of warming me up to be VP (External). Furthermore, I had the chance to get to know the SU’s Director of Research and Political Affairs (DRPA) Justin Williams–essentially, the VP’s (External) right-hand. Overall, it was a great time and I’m glad to see that a couple of you Councillors stepped-up your game and helped out with GOTV! Thanks! More info (e.g. number of pledges, feedback from surveys) will be reported in the following weeks about the campaign’s success and shortcomings.

4. Reforming the Elections Act

Despite our efforts in getting students to the polls on voting day (Mon, April 23rd), some of them faced grave challenges when it came to casting their ballot. This is all due to the archaic language in the Alberta Elections Act. Under the Act, students are “required to vote in their family’s constituency if they are studying away from home. Few students return home after leaving to go to school and in any case they remain

the best judge of where they consider their ordinary residence. The Elections Act should reflect that and allow students to declare whether they wish to vote in the constituency where they are studying or where they lived before university.”
(Council of Alberta University Students, *Securing Alberta's Future: How Alberta Can Lead in Post-Secondary Education*, Mar 2012)

There are instances of more than 50 students from Campus Saint-J  an being turned away from their democratic right to vote and this isn't right. So the task before CAUS (and all of you) is to document as many of these stories as possible from these victimized students. That way our case to the government on reforming the Act can have a lot more strength. The time is NOW for this lobby goal so we got to ride on this momentum, so please make a Facebook post about this and inquire about it!

5. Retreats

May is going to be a pretty busy month for me, so keep that in mind if you wanted to schedule a meeting with me sometime that month. I will be attending three different out-of-town retreats that month. Here are the tentative dates:

1. SU Executive Transition Retreat – May 1st-6th (Tue-Sun)
2. Council of Alberta University Students' (CAUS) (Provincial lobby group) – May 12th-15th (Sat-Tue)
3. Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) (Federal lobby group) – May 27th-28th (Sun-Mon) @ Red River College, Manitoba.

6. Acronyms

Here is a list of acronyms that the outgoing-VP (External) (Farid) had on one of his Reports to Council and I thought it'd be a good idea to include them here. They're common in my portfolio and you may hear employ these words in the future.

CAUS – Council of Alberta University Students (Provincial lobby group)
CASA – Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (Federal lobby group)
CSLP – Canada Student Loans Program
FTE – Full-Time Equivalent (1 FTE student is enrolled in a normal course load of 30 credits per year)
GOTV – Get Out the Vote!
PSE – Post-Secondary Education
SFA – Student Financial Assistance
SFAIC – Student Financial Aid Information Centre

7. Campaign Promises

For your information, here's a brief summary of my campaign promises. Figured you might be interested in them.

- Fight against increasing costs by advocating the government to regulate non-instructional fees, to abolish import regulations, and to eliminate dormitory property taxes.
- Initiate conversations about government investment in student work programs and advocate to reduce barriers faced by international students in the workforce.
- Engage students by regularly consulting student leaders and strengthen the SU's Lobby Training Program.

Conclusion

Well that's it for now, folks! Once things somewhat settle, I hope to sit down and meet with all of you individually. Not only will this be a good time so we can get to know each other a little bit better, but I'd love to hear some of your own passions, ideas, feedback, and thoughts on my work/promises.

Signing off,



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P.S. Feel free to text or call me on my cellphone! However, heads up—my phone is always on silent (so I miss like 99% of calls) and I take forever to text back. Nonetheless, feel free to stay in touch with me. Also, feel free to add me on Facebook. (My Facebook name is “Petros Well-Put Kusmu”.)

P.P.S. I'll get in touch with the new Policy Committee Chair (Councillor Navneet Khinda-Arts), schedule a meeting time, and begin transitioning her into Chairing the committee. (Since I'm the previous Chair of the committee.) Furthermore, I'll finally have some time to cleanup and polish the SU's Policy Documents with last Council's newly passed policies in second reading (Smoke Free Environment Policy and Fall Reading Week Policy).