



University of Alberta Students' Union

STRATEGIC PLAN

What We Do

Our mission is to serve, represent, and engage students.

Four pillars support our mission:

- We offer **services and businesses** that provide for the practical, social, academic, and personal needs of students.
- We organize **events and programs** that bring our campus together, help people connect, and build community on campus.
- We provide **space** for students to relax, study, and socialize. The Students' Union Building is the living room and civic centre of campus.
- We **advocate** for student interests to the University and all levels of government.

Why We Do It

We want to enrich students' University experience.

Our vision of a successful future is one where students:

- Feel accepted and welcome on campus;
- Thrive in a vibrant intellectual community;
- Are empowered and confident in their ability to succeed; and
- Contribute to the larger society as active citizens and effective leaders.

How We Do It

The way we do things is important—the values we live are part of who we are.

Do what's right, not what's easy.

We believe that acting with integrity and respect is essential to an open, collaborative, and democratic organization.

Inspire change for the world.

We strive to create a community where effective involvement shows students that they can change the world.

Act with unbridled compassion.

We help students make the most of any challenges they face by providing an inclusive and caring environment.

Always keep moving.

We adapt and innovate to meet the challenges and opportunities of our dynamic student environment.

Plan for tomorrow.

We act with future students in mind by making sustainable choices.



Critical Success Factors

The Students' Union has identified a number of factors critical to successfully fulfilling our mission, striving toward our vision, and upholding our values. For each of these Critical Success Factors, we have identified key goals to pursue with regard to these critical success factors.

In an environment like the Students' Union, forecasting needs and priorities beyond two years is particularly challenging: Each year, student leadership turns over almost completely. These goals will be reviewed annually and adjusted as appropriate.

1. SUPPORTING STUDENTS

The Students' Union's key role, broadly stated, is to support students. But what does that look like, and what does it mean in real terms?

We will know we are effective in supporting students when:

- We provide opportunities to students: opportunities to learn; to actively participate in governance; and to cross paths, interact, or work with peers.
- We provide unique services that support students in their academic and personal lives.
- We work to build a strong campus culture and community, providing opportunities for the intellectual, cultural, and social development of our members.

Goals

- Increase student opportunities (paid and volunteer) within the SU.* We will increase the number of unique students who are involved with the SU, and provide new opportunities for involvement through engagement mechanisms such as operations advisory groups and through participation in coursework opportunities, such as community service learning and capstone projects.
- Increase supports for students in governance.* We aim to double the number of students in governance roles who take part in governance training and development programs, expand recruitment activities and increase the number of students who participate in SU and University governance, and to provide increased assistance to Student Representative Associations in pursuing their advocacy goals.
- Ensure the inclusivity of the Students' Union: Improve the accessibility of facilities and programs and the diversity of students involved.* The students who work at the SU, use its services, or attend its events should proportionately reflect the student body at large. We aim for gender parity in governance activities and leadership programs and to increase the participation of international students in these areas. We will complete an accessibility audit of our facilities and programs, both real and on-line, and develop a strategy for enhancing accessibility.
- Promote better mental health among students.* We will continue our support for peer support programs and, where feasible, expand them; we will incorporate mental health wellness components into our programs and into our operations; and we will continue to work with the University to expand mental health resources for students.

e. *Provide for the social needs of students.* Our goal is to increase the number of Students' Union and student group events and to increase the proportion of events that are held on campus. We seek to expand the range, type, and number of extracurricular programs on campus through active collaboration with other parts of the University community. In support of this, we will strive to provide more integrated event support and services to groups on campus, and will work to streamline the overhead required to host events.

f. *Ensure the just treatment of students.* The University currently provides an ombuds service program. The mandate of that office is to promote fairness and ensure the rules are followed but is not however, intended to advocate on behalf of students. The Students' Union thus needs to champion students, ensuring that the rules are appropriate and fair, and that they recognize the inherent power differential between an individual student and the collective of the institution. The SU will explore developing a student-advocate service focused on ensuring that students have someone in their corner when faced with serious disciplinary action.

2. INCREASE OUR RELEVANCE TO, AND CONNECTION WITH, OUR MEMBERS

The Students' Union is an agent and representative of students. Our legitimacy is grounded in our ability to accurately reflect and represent the views of students. We must have the support of our members, and our membership should feel an affiliation to the Students' Union.

To achieve this, we must be relevant to our members, communicate effectively with them, and provide for real engagement between student leaders and the people they represent.

Over the next five years, we will develop and implement better strategies for talking with students. These strategies will need to take into account the following considerations:

- *Going mobile.* Our members are increasing mobile; 80% of visits to the health plan site are from mobile devices. Our online services and our communication platforms must be developed from that perspective.
- *Focusing on the user experience.* Accessing SU services and programs should be as simple as possible, and focused on the best user experience. Currently, user experience competes with other organizational and promotional needs.
- *Providing for interaction.* Affiliation builds off of relationships, and relationships are built by talking. We must use social media more effectively and engage in more two-way conversations with our members, and we must improve and expand opportunities for students to provide us feedback.
- *Micro-targeting.* The rise of social media and other changes in the media environment has made it easier and more common for individuals to have 'bubbled' exposure to media—that is, from Facebook to the open web to apps like WhatsApp, individuals are more likely to get their information from the communities they are part of, rather than from mass media. This requires that we become better at identifying and targeting these communities, if we want to communicate more effectively.

- *Reassessing the most-effective mass communication platforms.* With the decline of print media, and given that mass communication tools remain a key element to any communication strategy, we need to assess which mass-communication platforms deliver the best return on investment.

Goals

- Refocus our communications strategy to emphasize social media.* Social media will continue to be a key communications tool over the next five years—it is where our members are.
- Redevelop our online communication and service delivery platforms to be more mobile-friendly.* Although our existing services do have some mobile capabilities, they operate and look more like a modified version of our online offerings, rather than as mobile-native services. This impacts the usability and reach of those services.
- Connect with alumni.* Alumni with strong Students' Union connections can provide perspective, history, and mentorship. Their networks are also a key resource for helping us forge coalitions and collaborations, both internal and external to the University community.

3. COLLABORATION

As an organization with limited resources but a big mandate and ambitious goals, we cannot expect to be able to single-handedly do all of the things we want to. We will need to collaborate with others—the University, student groups, faculty, other stakeholder associations—to achieve our goals.

Collaboration is also a touchstone of our organizational culture. Internally and externally, we seek to build productive, cooperative relationships that respect the needs of all collaborators.

We will know we are succeeding at building better collaborative relationships when:

- Our areas of expertise are widely recognized and respected;
- The Students' Union is a sought-after partner;
- We are trusted to fulfil our obligations and carry our weight, even across multiple years and Councils; and,
- Our collaborations and partnerships are respectful in tone and based on consensus.

Goals

- Build credibility, assure stability, and strengthen relationships.* The Students' Union's annual turnover in student leadership is, we believe, a strength that enables the SU to be a uniquely vibrant, responsive, and creative organization. That same turnover, however, can also be perceived as a weakness, a source of instability and unreliability. In order to combat this perception, we will take additional efforts to identify and educate key individuals in the University community about the Students' Union, the meaning of a policy-governance model, the role of permanent staff in ensuring

continuity, and the structures we have in place to promote stability from year to year. We will also implement a program for ensuring that all collaborative ventures include a senior member of the permanent staff as an ongoing contact.

- b. Develop systems and expertise that are unique in the University community.* The strength of our collaborative relationships relies, in good measure, on the added value we bring to partners. To that end, the Students' Union has unique capabilities and knowledge in the areas of digital media, event venues and planning, leadership development, and various services that merit additional investment over the next five years. We will, in particular, prioritize the development of leadership programming and event support services, in order to become recognized on campus as 'content experts' in these areas.
- c. Actively seek to collaborate wherever possible.* In the past, the Students' Union has often sought partners after ideas were essentially implemented; going forward, our planning process will incorporate an active assessment of potential partners in the earliest stages of project development.
- d. Leverage our research department to become thought leaders on post-secondary policy issues.* The Students' Union already produces original research and policy analysis, and by increasing both the volume of that work and how widely we share it, we will foster the development of stronger collaborative relationships with our advocacy partners.

4. BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

In order to deliver on its vision, the Students' Union requires sufficient resources to support new initiatives and projects. The primary restraint on the Students' Union is not ideas or ability, but resources—facilities, operating funds, and staffing.

Goals

- a. Develop and expand non-student revenue sources.* The Students' Union will explore generating more funds for capital and programs through establishing a giving program, expanding sponsorship relationships, and increasing advertising sales. We will also explore the possibility of commercializing or selling technology developed internally, and partnering with external companies that can provide added value to students.
- b. Improve business performance.* We will seek to increase the long-term rate of return on revenue from business units. We believe this number can be increased significantly, with each additional percent of margin contributing between \$40-50K to our service and advocacy units. To increase our performance, we will focus on driving volumes and improve efficiencies: we will develop a clear quality of service strategy and improve marketing and presentation to increase usage, and ensure key operating ratios are kept in line to ensure operations are efficient.
- c. Maintain capital assets.* Central to our ability to attract students and fulfill our mandate is having key space and capital assets. Myer Horowitz Theatre and Dinwoodie Lounge are in need of a major renovation to maintain competitiveness in a changing environment and to support higher activity levels. The North Power Plant has the

potential to become a key event centre for student group and alumni activities. In addition to these major projects, it is vital that sufficient capital resources be devoted to service and business units, so that their ability to perform is maintained.

- d. Restructure to better align staff responsibilities with strategic needs.* We will restructure to reflect the increased focus of human resources, provide additional senior support to business units, and ensure that all pillars of the Students' Union are represented in strategic decision-making.
- e. Ensure appropriate resources and structures are in place to support political advocacy efforts.* Effective advocacy requires administrative and policy support, and a framework for supporting advocacy campaigns. Developing this framework will allow our campaigns to achieve a greater level of success.
- f. Develop our human capital.* Through professional development programming, appropriate and supportive personnel policies, staff recognition programs, and improved performance management, we will provide better tools to help our staff be as effective as possible.
- g. Integrate sustainability into operations.* We already do many things in a sustainable manner—from the use of eco-friendly cleaners to recycling old furniture and fixtures to sourcing food locally—but we can do better. We will build systematic, periodic reviews of the social, environmental, and fiscal impacts of our operations into our management protocols.

What's Next: The Role of This Plan

A strategic plan is the starting line, not the finish line. To achieve the plan, organizational commitment, culture, and processes must support it.

The role of this plan and the goals within it is to provide context and direction to the annual Executive and operational planning that occurs. All units of the organization prepare and revise operating plans on a semi-annual basis; in those operating plans, we lay out the specific projects and goals that contribute to the larger vision laid out in the strategic plan.