Advocacy Training
For Students’ Council
What is Advocacy?

“A broad set of tactics used to influence a decision often political in nature.”
It can involve…

- Gaining **support** for a cause
- Raising **public awareness**
- **Lobbying** Executives or fellow Councilors
- Changing **attitudes** or practices
- Maintaining the **status quo**
- Putting a **new decision** on the table

*Tip: Advocacy should always reflect your goals and resources.*
Can Councilors advocate?

Yes!

However, because Students’ Council is a policy board, Councillor advocacy looks a little different, and is directed entirely inward.
Inward-facing Advocacy

• Councillors can **lobby** SU Executives to make certain decisions or support certain initiatives
• Councillors can **advocate** to SU Executives and each other on important decisions coming through Council
• **Advocacy** should be **policy-centered**

*Note: You cannot, as an individual, tell the SU what to do.*
Outward-Facing Advocacy

• Council as a whole can direct the SU’s advocacy efforts by creating Political Policy

• All advocacy from the SU to outside bodies, be they University, government, or otherwise, is handled by the SU Executives

Note: Outward = Anything not directly controlled by the SU
Types of Advocacy

and when to use them
Lobbying

• Direct communication intended to influence decisions or put new decisions on the table.

• Can be done through:
  • Meetings
  • Phone calls
  • E-mails
  • Letters
Media

- Use with caution.
- Contact with external media like news outlets should be done in conjunction with Executives.

- Types
  - Social Media
  - Interviews
  - Online Videos
Advertising

- Use for finding participants for focus groups or committees, or to direct constituents to more information about an issue.

- **Types**
  - Newsletters
  - Posters
  - Handbills
  - Tabling
  - Class talks
Petitions

• Use to show quantifiable support or opposition to a particular issue, change, or question.

• Types
  • Paper
  • Online
  • Email
Consultation

• Consultation can simultaneously show you what you should be advocating for and give you materials with which to advocate or lobby.

• Types
  • Surveys
  • Plebiscites/Referenda
  • Focus Groups
  • Collaborative Projects
  • Town Halls
How to Advocate?
Determine your Position

- Having a carefully thought out position right from the beginning will make your advocacy efforts simpler and more consistent.
What is best for your organization?

• You may have been elected by your faculty, but you are stewards of the entire organization

• Ensure all efforts follow our strategic plan, our values, and our political policy

*Tip: Try to think long-term and campus-wide*
What is best for your organization?

- Consider the SU’s reputation, legitimacy, and external relationships
- Follow the rules - this includes SU bylaw, political policy, and any relevant Standing Orders

Tip: Try not to damage relationships or reputation.
What is best for your constituents?

- Use your existing knowledge of your constituents’ needs and concerns
- Conduct additional consultation whenever possible

Tip: Make a list of needs vs. wants and prioritize.
Engage Members

• When your advocacy position is backed by member feedback, and your membership is involved and passionate about it, you gain legitimacy.
Education

An informed membership will be more involved, and will help you make better decisions on their behalf

- **Online**: mass e-mail and social media
- **In person**: class talks, tabling, and town halls
- **Advertising**: posters, handbills, and paid ads
Online

- Your Faculty Association may have access to a mailing list
- Use social media like Facebook or Twitter to spread the word quickly
- Fast and easy, but not always effective

Tip: Keep information as concise as possible.
In Person

- Explain issues more thoroughly
- Get feedback while explaining issues
- Reaches fewer constituents, but in a more impactful way

Tip: Be prepared and willing to answer question.
Advertising

• Inform constituents of upcoming events or decisions they can participate in
• All advertisements from the SU must go through our marketing department – ask an Executive or the General Manager for help

Note: You cannot direct the activities of SU staff.
Consultation

This is a crucial part of advocacy:

- **Prioritize** and direct your advocacy efforts
- **Determine** the most pressing issues
- **Accurately** represent your members
- **Legitimize** your position
Surveys

• Get **consistent, measurable** data
• Gather **feedback** from a lot of people at once
• More quantitative than qualitative
• Regular surveys can track long-term trends
• Many FAs already conduct surveys – ask them about it!

*Tip:* *Keep questions as neutral as possible.*
Plebiscites and Referenda

• More official than a survey
• Provides a clear mandate from students, broken down by vote
• Referenda are binding, plebiscites are not
• Not always practical outside of election season

Note: Council can create these without petitioning students.
Focus Groups

- More qualitative than quantitative
- Get *in-depth analysis* or feedback
- Directly represent opinions of members at large

**Tip:** Discover Governance can help you organize, advertise, and conduct focus groups.
Collaborative Projects

- More qualitative than quantitative
- Often more anonymous than focus groups
- More fun and engaging
- Provides a visual representation of member opinion

Tip: Can be done with constituents or fellow Councilors
Engage other Representatives

- Meet with Faculty Associations
- Meet with DAs, PAs, and clubs
- Keep in contact with GFC Councilors
- Consult international students when possible

Tip: Most FA’s have a relatively high consultative capacity.
Town Halls

- Disseminate information and get feedback
- Very public show of consultative effort
- Councilors have utilized this in the past, though it rarely happens (it should happen more!)
- Ask your FA if you can speak at their AGMs and town halls

Tip: Include votes and discussion periods to engage attendees.
Lobbying

Directly reach decision-makers:
- **Articulate** your needs more thoroughly and precisely
- Get **immediate feedback** on your concerns
- Negotiate for better decisions
Lobbying Methods

- Two Main Methods of Lobbying
- 1. Topic Expert: build a reputation of being able to provide information and insight. This is built over time through planning, data management, and good transitions.

Tip: Change methods to reflect who you’re talking to...
Lobbying Methods

• 2. Sales Pitch: focus on demonstrating something the person is missing or should consider and sell them the solution.

Tip: …or to reflect what you are trying to achieve.
Meetings

- Know the **issue** and your **objectives**
- Be **neat, presentable, polite, and personal**
- Arrive early
- Directly ask for what you want, **listen carefully** to their response, and take notes
- Leave information and **follow up** afterwards

*Tip: Send a thank-you note after the meeting.*
Phone Calls

• Shorter and less personal
• A good way to set up meetings, gather information quickly, or follow up after meetings
• Less effective than in-person meetings for actual lobbying efforts

Tip: When e-mail fails, try the phone.
Letters and E-Mails

- A form of lobbying that any student can participate in
- As a representative, e-mails or letters should only be used to set up meetings, or follow up after a meeting, whenever in-person meetings are possible

Tip: Use this to compliment your lobbying efforts.
Representation

Automatic, easy access to decision-makers:

- Students’ Council and Standing Committees
- Some FAs have seats for their Councilors
- Attend town halls or AGMs held by FAs, the SU, your faculty, or the University
Students’ Council and Standing Committees

• Ask the right questions or make the right statements to sway the vote in your favour
• Sit on committees, or ask to proxy for a meeting if an item you care about is being discussed or voted on

Tip: Don’t underestimate the power of a good question.
Town Halls

- Try to attend FA, faculty, or University-run town halls and participate in them
- Get informed and gather feedback
- Show Council involvement and/or support in the community

Tip: Focus on giving and receiving information.
Keep Records

Well organized records will help future Councillors advocate better on similar issues:

• File important correspondence
• Outline the issue, who was involved, what you did, what was effective/not, and update it as you go along