

Date: March 09, 2021
To: Students' Union Council
Re: President 2020/21 Report #20

Dear Council,

The last few weeks have been a whirlwind, and we are at the end of UASU elections now. I would like to give a huge shout out to those who ran in the elections. It is not easy to put yourself out there, and it takes guts to do so. Congratulations to the incoming Executive team, Rowan, Abner, Christian, Emily and Talia. I am so proud of all of you and can't wait to work with you all over the next few months in transition. Congratulations as well to Dave on your election as Board of Governors representative, it has been a pleasure working with you this year.

An overriding concern for our team this year has been the challenges faced by students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to remote delivery of courses. As referenced in my previous report, students have serious concerns about the use of e-proctoring software, particularly with regard to privacy and equity issues, and while other Alberta universities have recognized this and banned or heavily curtailed the use of such programs, U of A has yet to follow suit. International students have also been facing unique challenges regarding courses which require synchronous attendance and/or where professors refuse to post course material for access outside of the regular class time, meaning that students who have been forced to stay in countries such as India and China have had to attend class during unreasonable hours (particularly 11:00pm-5:00am their time) or risk being penalized. While student leaders have been raising these concerns since May, university administration has not yet taken serious action. Finally, on January 25th, student representatives, led by our Vice-President Academic, David Draper, and I, were able to take the floor at GFC in order to bring these concerns to the university's highest academic governing body. In the aftermath of that meeting, President Flanagan and Provost Dew have taken some action, including a commitment to create a Task Force on Remote Teaching and Learning. While the UASU appreciates these steps, we continue to call on administration to take more meaningful action, including banning the use of e-proctoring software.

Our Vice-President External, Rowan Ley, has spent a majority of this academic year sitting as a member of the guiding coalition for the *Alberta 2030* review of the post-secondary system. Unfortunately, throughout the process, there have been numerous signs that the government and their contractor are not adequately listening to stakeholders throughout the post-secondary system. In January, Vice-President Ley and I attended a series of town halls pertaining to this review, which were the last stage of public and broad stakeholder participation, and the concepts which were raised there were frustratingly lacking in detail. This means that whatever tangible actions come out of the review, particularly with regard to hot-button issues such as tuition regulation and institutional governance, will not have been formed with true stakeholder consultation. For more on this, higher education consultant Alex Usher [published this recent write-up](#) on the review and the potential negative impacts that it may have on Alberta's post-secondary system. While we continue to engage with the ministry regarding our priorities for the review, and have recently seen a few signs that they are starting to listen on certain points, we continue to take nothing for granted until the review's report is publicly released.

Most recently, the Alberta Budget was released with huge slashes to Post Secondary in Alberta. I am disappointed with the cuts to post secondary institutions in Alberta, and frustrated that over half of the overall cuts are just to the University of Alberta. The government has now slashed over \$170 million over just 16 months, which will lead to about a 22.5% increase in tuition by the end of the next year. The University of Alberta is one of Canada's top universities, and has a huge impact on Alberta's economy - it is one of our provinces greatest assets. We as UASU Executives are doing all that we can to push back but we need your help. I would appreciate your help to make your voice heard by writing a letter to your MLA or to the Minister. You can do so here: <http://penguinsforpse.com/> You can read our full [press release here](#).

Joel Agarwal, President

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The COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for students to express their displeasure with actions that the provincial government is taking with regards to post-secondary, and to raise the alarm about the potential for brain drain to impede Alberta's economic recovery. However, as you may have seen relatively recently, our Executive team and other student leaders from across Alberta came up with a creative way to amplify our voices while respecting COVID-19 protocols. The [#PenguinsforPSE campaign](#) gained more traction than we had initially expected, and I am very encouraged to see the amount of engagement and attention that the campaign has generated since it began in January. Thank you to the students and UASU Councillors who came out to support this initiative.

As I mentioned in my last report, our Vice-President Student Life, Katie Kidd, has been actively working to improve aspects of the student experience, including the university's approach to sexual violence prevention and response. I am very happy to be able to report that as a result of her work, the UASU was able to advance a proposal which would finally see university administration hire a Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Coordinator, a position which the UASU has been advocating for for years. While the final deal does require students to contribute \$1.50 per Fall and Winter semester in order to partially fund the position, consultation with students found widespread support for the initiative, which was also unanimously supported by Students' Council. As a result, this incredibly important position will finally be created and staffed, and will only cost each student approximately as much as the cost of one cup of coffee per year. This proposal has been approved by at Academic Planning Committee, the Board Finance Property Committee, and pending final approval at the Board of Governors meeting this Friday.

Finally, from an internal UASU perspective, we continue to do our best to serve our undergraduate student members even given the challenges presented by COVID-19. This includes keeping our Students' Union Building open as a safe place for students to study or eat if they are on campus, and having transitioned as many of our services as possible to be accessible online. Unfortunately, one offering which we have had to close for this Winter semester in order to keep students safe and best abide by public health orders is Dewey's, one of our bars, which had been open in the Fall for take-out and limited dine-in service. While we know that this was disappointing to some students, our number one focus is safety. We look forward to the day when Dewey's, and indeed all of our businesses and services, can be fully open once again.

As always, please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments relating to my report. My office hours are by appointment, so if you would like to meet regarding any matter - please feel free to email me at president@uasu.ca

Yours Sincerely,



Joel Agarwal
University of Alberta Students' Union President