Hi Council,

I hope you have had excellent Reading Weeks and are feeling rested and ready to face the rest of the semester and finals. I have been away for the last week to deal with a family issue in BC, and so haven’t seen you all around campus, but I know how tough this time of year can be. Student mental health challenges often peak in the late Fall semester, so if you are struggling right now you are not alone. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to Counselling and Clinical Services, the Peer Support Centre, or any member of the Exec team or the Speaker if we can support you in governance spaces.

**Remembrance Day**
On November 11th, the Students’ Union would usually participate in laying a wreath at the City of Edmonton’s annual Remembrance Day ceremony in the Butterdome. For the second year in a row we did not have that opportunity as Remembrance Day events were cancelled or downsized due to COVID, but I still took some time to reflect on the meaning of the day. Hundreds of students just like us from the U of A participated in the First and Second World Wars, Korean War, and others. I am always conscious of the responsibility to remember their sacrifices, and reminded that democracy is about responsibility and sacrifice just as much as it is about rights and freedoms.

**Student Aid Reports**
The Registrar’s Office has completed their annual student financial aid report (item 3), which we discussed at GFC Council on Student Affairs and Academic Planning Committee. While there are some promising trends in the report, we continue to have concerns about how it is allocated. Particularly in 2020-21, when many students were suffering extreme financial and academic stress, the University chose to offer nearly a million dollars in entrance incentives to new international students using reserves. While the ability to access reserves was a temporary COVID measure, it is distressing that this money was used as an incentive for new students to accept U of A offers rather than as a lifeline for current students who desperately needed help. We are also concerned by the very high proportion of operationally funded student aid that is primarily merit-based, and believe the needs-based and hybrid portions should be much higher. This is a shift that is gradually happening, but we are committed to ensuring it continues.

**SRA Summit**
The Exec team was very pleased to participate in the UASU’s first SRA Summit. Each faculty association, the ISA, and ASC each sent a delegate, and we had a productive day of community-building activities, training, and discussions about how to address loneliness and mental health issues on campus at the source. VP Monteiro did an excellent job organizing the event, and I can say that aside from getting good work done, we had a really good time. The last year of online events has sometimes made me forget how important in-person conversations and socializing are to the relationships and community that make our work here effective. I also enjoyed facilitating the section on advocacy meeting strategies. We want to make sure that SRAs have the practical skills to be as effective as possible, and making sure they have access to practical training and skill-building is an important project for the Students’ Union— not just this year, but in a more enduring and sustainable way.

Sexual Violence Advocacy
I am continuing to work to address the disturbing allegations of sexual violence against AASUA President Ricardo Acuña, and the allegations against former Drama instructor Patrick Howarth which recently became public. The Students’ Union remains firm in our position that Mr. Acuña needs to resign as President of AASUA. I am also working closely with VPs Monteiro and Dixon to advance policy changes that will protect students from predatory behaviour by those in positions of power in the University community.

Name Changes in University Systems
We have discussed the need for trans students to have their name accurately reflected on their transcript and degree parchment with the Registrar’s office. Like most changes to Bear Tracks there is a technical aspect to this discussion, and so I can’t give too many details right now, but we will update Council as soon as those details become available. We are also looking at best practices at other universities to help make the case to the University that this change is overdue— for example, California Governor Gavin Newsom recently signed legislation requiring post-secondary institutions to use trans students’ current names in documentation.

Sincerely,

University of Alberta Students’ Union President
Rowan Ley