Dear Council,

Below is a brief update of essential activities in the last two weeks.

**CASA**

**Policy and Strategy Conference**

Two weeks ago, I attended CASA's annual policy and strategy conference in Calgary which was hosted by the University of Calgary Students’ Union. This conference is where CASA membership focuses on setting the direction of the organization for the academic year. Members discuss a host of topics relating to the concerns and ideas of the students they represent. After carefully debating these topics, the members identify their top priorities and devise strategies for how best to achieve these over the year. This conference is also when the Board Action Plan is approved. The Board action plan is a document that outlines the goals and projects that CASA's Board of Directors seeks to accomplish for the year. These projects or goals must be tied to CASA's strategic plan which runs on a 3-year cycle.

As Chair of the Board of Directors for CASA, my role was to work alongside our Board of Directors to communicate and consult with the membership on the action plan and advocacy priorities that the board had suggested based on feedback and workshops prior to approving them at our closing plenary. This year, CASA's advocacy priorities were split into 3 defined categories: Budget asks, Regulatory ask, and Research/Collaborative projects. Mental health and Student Financial Aid were identified as the two priority themes in our budget ask; International students, Graduate Research, and Indigenous learners were the three priorities for our regulatory ask, and; Affordable housing and food security were prioritized as topics that CASA needs to do more research on.

In addition to approval of these two important documents, other sessions that occurred during the conference included Media training, an intro to Government Relations, a History of CASA’s advocacy and advocacy campaigns, as well as some time for committees to catch up on work.

In attendance at the conference was CBC International journalist, Sarbmeet Singh. Sarbmeet was wanting to learn more about student unions and the role international students play in SU and federal advocacy. You can read highlights of the conference from an article by CBC international [HERE](#).

**Campus Tours**

I was able to join our Executive Director in campus visits for some of our CASA members in B.C. We visited the University of Fraser Valley Students' Union Society (UFVSUS) and Kwantlen Students' Association (KSA) respectively in Abbotsford, and Surrey, B.C. This was an opportunity to catch up and hear directly from some of our members what their issues, concerns, or feedback they have for CASA.

Christian Fotang, Vice President External

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Student Union Development Summit (SUDS)

From August 12-15th, I and the rest of the executive team attended the Students’ Union Development Summit conference hosted by the UBC Alma Mater Society. As defined on their website, SUDS “bring[s] together student union representatives from across Canada and provide them with a platform to share their experiences, ideas, and best practices for running a successful student-oriented organization. By so doing, the delegates will gain valuable insights into improving their respective student unions - all in addition to learning tangible personal skills that translate to both the student government and the professional world.”

The conference was opened by keynote speaker Daniel Quan-Watson who is the Deputy Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs. Deputy Minister Watson had an inspirational speech that offered gripping lessons in leadership. Illustrating his journey through public service, and his countless stories of success and failures, Deputy Minister Watson painted the highs and lows and leadership, the lessons learned from bad bosses, and the unforgettable impacts of even better bosses. The river of questions that followed Deputy Minister Watson’s speech ranging from a topic of emotional intelligence in leadership, knowing when to leave your job or when passion has burnt out and how to cope with imposter syndrome showed just how well he captivated the audience. Following that opening night, the rest of the weekend was spent networking with counterparts, attending various workshops such as Media Literacy, GR, and lobbying, and learning the best practices of negotiation and how to run effective campaigns.

Media

I spoke with the Edmonton Journal regarding student attitudes this upcoming fall semester towards the increased cost of living as a result of inflation. I shared with the journalist some of the anxiety and worry that students have as costs of groceries, textbooks, and other costs associated with being a student are rising. While financial literacy helps set students up to be resilient to the impact of the rising cost of living I shared other multi-pronged approaches that could be taken from stakeholders such as the government, the University, and the UASU. You can find the article [HERE].

Cheers,

Christian Fotang
Vice President External
University of Alberta Students’ Union