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1. Message from the AMS Vice-President, External Affairs

Dear Colleagues,

As my term as Vice-President, External Affairs comes to a close, I have been taking a few moments each day to reflect upon the past twelve months in office. I can say with certainty that this has been a challenging year that has presented twists and turns that were unexpected; however, by and large I have been pleased with the achievements and outcomes that have originated from my office. In one year, this office has launched a successful provincial elections campaign, lobbied for increased transit service and funding, created a provincial lobbying organization, re-opened lines of communication with external groups across BC, developed new communication tools, and changed the way in which the VP, External Affairs interacts with students.

It must also be stated that this year was not void of mistakes, however, I have learned a great deal from these mistakes and incorporated each lesson into my office moving forward. I would also like to take this time to thank my staff, Bahareh Jokar, Patrick Meehan, and Francesca McDowell, as well as Ekateryna Baranovskaya for their contributions and hard work over the length of my term. I also would like to thank the 2013-2014 executive for their collaboration and teamwork in overcoming numerous challenges this year.

This report encompasses most areas of my office's activities to date, including an evaluation of my goals while in office. Should you have any other questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at vpexternal@ams.ubc.ca

Sincerely,

Tanner Bokor
Vice-President, External Affairs
2. Year Goals

2.1 External Advocacy Commission:

With the creation of the External Advocacy Commission, my key goal this year was to develop the procedures of ADVOCOM and carrying out its mandates in a way that brings in a wide diversity of ideas and backgrounds, and assist with the creation and operation of externally focused advocacy campaigns.

These mandates included the creation of a Strategic Outreach Plan, an audit of the societies’ external outreach to students, the development of new advocacy guidelines to help shape the development of campaigns under future VPX’s, and multiple interactive consultation sessions around external policy issues in a manner that engages students and collects feedback to help design messaging for future campaigns.

Overall, much of the work on this goal was started; however, much of the development work is still underway. The workflow and management of ADVOCOM were conceptualized and put into practice for the development of the Build Broadway campaign which begun in September 2013. However, the commission was never fully filled with members at large, and much of the work, such as the Strategic Outreach Plan, had to be placed on the back-burner due to issues elsewhere in the portfolio. The advocacy guidelines were developed in coordination with the University & Government Relations Advisor, and while they are not codified, were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the VP, External’s campaigns this year. Over the course of my term, I held two consultations on external policy issues, including a proposed aboriginal student financial aid policy with a group of aboriginal students earlier in my term and a bike share expansion policy with the Bike Co-op in October.

I believe that ADVOCOM still plays an important role in making the society’s external advocacy more effective and that it has filled a pre-existing gap in the portfolio. However, I would recommend that moving forward, ADVOCOM be reviewed for its effectiveness, and that potential revisions be made to its mandate to make it more relevant to the portfolio and the society at large.

2.2 Student Union Development Summit

In the 90’s, the AMS hosted the annual Student Union Development Symposium, a skills-sharing conference with student union executives from across Canada. Revived in 2012, SUDS was rebranded as the Student Union Development Summit, and this year the coordination and execution of the conference is under the External portfolio.

This year, my goal was to run the conference with no more than $2,500 of operating loss, as well as create new methods to collect feedback from delegates to be used for future conferences, and also develop a best-practices and skills-sharing online platform for student unions that extends SUDS past the physical conference.

The conference was held on August 8th-11th in Vancouver, with accommodations booked in Totem Park Residence. Our target was 80 delegates from 20 schools, and given that the previous year had been coordinated in five weeks with 67 delegates in attendance, this goal is attainable. The theme of the conference was “student unions moving into the 21st century” with a focus on the fundamentals of what
makes a student union and what the current generation of university students need out of their student societies.

On the financial front, I am pleased to say that SUDS had returned $2,200 in net profit thanks to budgetary controls put in place by myself and by the VP Finance. We had 87 delegates attend this year’s conference, including the AMS Executive, with representatives from 26 student associations, which beat previous expectations. The programming was re-focused, to include discussion periods each day for each relevant portfolio, and a selection of workshops for delegates to choose from that ranged from focusing on student union legal matters, to how to deal with student press. I also developed a system called SUDServices for delegates to continue conversations begun at SUDS past the conference; however, the system needs further review and evaluation to make it relevant and accessible for student union executives across the country.

Overall, the conference was a success, and a separate transition report will be provided to my successor detailing the conference in its entirety. I would recommend that in future, the VP, External continue to host SUDS, however, I would strongly suggest that this be done in collaboration with other student unions and that a separate management committee be struck with various attending student unions to develop a more holistic program with greater by-in from student executives. I would also suggest seeking further sponsorship from external sources to help lower the delegate fees, and to review the possibility of recording select sessions to make the conference accessible to all student executives in Canada.

2.3 Alliance of BC Students/Lobby Days

On issues that directly relate to post-secondary education, regional transportation, and childcare, the provincial government is the body that is overall responsible. To effectively address the societies provincial lobbying efforts, we worked closely to develop the Alliance of BC Students, a coalition of student unions across BC, as well as develop a new campaign around post-secondary student issues with the Alliance.

Part of this was to the restart of the annual Lobby Days event, where the AMS was to hold lobbying sessions in Victoria with governing and opposition parties. Our secondary goal was to expand this to the ABCS, and also create a more presentable and comprehensive document outlining the AMS’s external priorities that could be used for lobbying purposes.

This goal took a slightly different turn that envisioned. The Alliance of BC Students became the vehicle through which the AMS revived Lobby Days, which took place in July 2013. Nine student associations attended a total of five meetings with the Ministry of Advanced Education, Ministry of Technology, Innovation, and Citizen Services, Ministry of Education, Liberal Caucus, and NDP Caucus. In advance of this meeting, the AMS prepared a document with the ABCS which outlines our collective policy priorities, including re-introducing needs-based grants, lowering student loan interest rates, increasing core funding, introducing an integrated childcare program, and increasing the level of funding to public transit service and infrastructure. While this document doesn’t purely focus on the AMS’s external priorities, our external policies are currently represented through the ABCS’s own policies.

My office was also intimately involved in solidifying the ABCS as a provincially-registered society. In November, the ABCS held it’s Inaugural General Meeting where it created a new set of bylaws that enshrined the values of transparency and collaboration, and five student associations ratified as the first
members. These associations include the AMS, UBC GSS, UVVSUS, CSU, and UVSS. The BCITSA, KSA, and LSU joined in January 2014.

This is the achievement I have been most proud of. After a decade, the AMS finally has a provincial counterpart on the external portfolio. That said, I would recommend that the AMS continue to evaluate the ABCS and continue to contribute to the development of the organization moving forward. Lobby Days should be institutionalized, and processes and procedures should be developed to ensure a smooth coordination process and that we continue to collaborate with the other ABCS member associations.

2.4 Rapid Transit

In 2012, the society took the approach of focusing on the regional transportation picture through the Get OnBoard BC campaign. While still a major focus of our external priorities, we continue to be in a critical decision point regarding the proposed Broadway rapid transit project.

For 2013-2014, we redeveloped our approach to rapid transit; including a new Broadway-centric transit campaign called Build Broadway, alongside our support of the Get OnBoard BC campaign. This campaign followed a similar approach, with engagement to stakeholders along the corridor in the campaign, lobbying regional mayors on the issues surrounding regional transit, while also including new tools for engagement for students and the general public in an aim to make the Broadway Line and regional transit a critical issue.

Build Broadway called for short-term improvements to transit along the Broadway corridor, long-term investments from the provincial government, and a rail-based rapid transit line from Commercial Drive to UBC. At the same time, my office developed OutreachAMS, a communications tool built on the Nationbuilder community organizing platform and enhanced by CStreet Campaigns out of Toronto, ON, which aided in centralizing students to one page for all AMS-related external campaigns, opened up a dedicated newsletter for external-related issues, and allowed the office to connect to students through other communications mean such as through text messaging and social media. With Get OnBoard BC, the office worked closely with the Campaign Director, Lee Haber, to continue to develop a “Transit Now” campaign as a follow up to 2012’s launch of the coalition, which is at this time still in development.

This file was the most volatile of all in the VP, External portfolio. During the 2013 General Elections, the BC Liberals promised to hold a transit referendum to allow the public to choose what methods of taxation if any they would permit to fund public transit in Metro Vancouver. For this reason, much of our rapid transit goals have been on hold while we await further clarification on the referendum, expected to happen in fall 2014. OutreachAMS has performed well, with over 35,000 unique page views in September and October, and the Build Broadway campaign having more than 435 petition signatures as of February 2014. The system, which is still needing further development, has exceeded expectations, and I would highly recommend that my successor continue to build the platform’s capacity and use it as a vehicle to communicate with students. Overall, the transit file will be going under the most substantial change in 2014-2015, and while the direction of the issue of public transit at this time is unknown, the society must ensure it continues to be a regional player and continue to work with external stakeholders whenever possible on this very important topic.
2.5 U-Pass BC

The U-Pass BC program, first introduced at UBC in 2003, is evolving and expanding with the renewal of the collective agreement in March 2013. With the introduction of the Compass program, an entirely electronic fare collection and enforcement network, there continues to be a great need to review the External portfolio’s customer service methods around subsidies and opt-in/opt-out issues, as well as develop and implement a communication plan around how to use the new Compass U-Pass system.

Without a doubt, this has been my most frustrating file as VP, External. The Compass program as it stands has experienced significant technical difficulty, and while I am confident in the controls and privacy policies in place to protect student data, I am concerned that Compass will have an overall negative impact on the transit experience of all UBC students. We continue to face issues and questions around Compass card distribution, communications, and overall program implementation. Unfortunately, much of this information is confidential at the request of TransLink due to the sensitive nature of the program. For this reason, much of the work my office and the U-Pass Advisory Committee has done on this file has been in back channels, and will not fully be implemented until a later date.

In the meantime, conversations around how UBC students interact with the U-Pass BC program are alive and well in my portfolio. I implemented an online ticket system for U-Pass customer service, which has decreased our case load by 30%, and have been working with UBC to create system-wide efficiencies for how customer service is handled by the university. I have also begun work on developing a multipass program to increase the value of the program to students, and I have been working with TransLink and UBC on implementing an automatic Compass card distribution system for UBC students, modelled off the current distribution solution for U-Pass BC paper cards. Later in my term, I successfully negotiated a new U-Pass Subsidy Agreement with UBC which provided the AMS $57,000 to subsidize the term cost of a U-Pass for students experiencing financial hardship or excessive commute conditions. Lastly, I worked closely with the VP, Finance to implement a new cross-campus solution for UBC-O and UBC-V students to receive U-Pass BC benefits no matter which campus they are studying at, however, this solution will not be in effect until later this year.

Going forward, I highly recommend that the AMS move its operational aspects of U-Pass BC to the AMS Services Department to increase accessibility and provide the program the necessary resources to serve students faster and more efficiently. I also recommend that the AMS push for an earlier contract negotiation with TransLink and UBC, in which we advocate for a longer contract term with a set rate of increase, indexed to the rate of fare increases as approved by the provincial government, to ensure program continuity. For Compass, I wish my successor much luck with navigating the implementation process, and hope that they will be able to work with the other student associations for a smooth and uneventful rollout at some point in the future.

2.6 Office Modifications

The Office of the Vice-President, External is perhaps the most ambiguous and shifting office of all AMS executives. In order to make the office easier to connect with and act as more of a resource to the entire student population, I intended that the office would undergo a review of its structure and how we develop and implement society policy. Furthermore, to ensure the societies continuing non-partisan stance, I began to look at formally entrenching the “all political, non-partisan” method for lobbying.
Due to other projects demanding more resources later in my term, much of this work was not completed. In June, I began the conversation with LPC regarding enshrining the non-partisan stance into the societies governing documents, however, while there was general agreement around the table, there were concerns raised about the effectiveness and potential limiting effect this change may have had on the society. I did implement a new section of code which required the society to have guidelines that governed the development of external policy, which went into effect in late 2013. In terms of the review of the VP, External in code and bylaw, this process had to be put on hold.

This goal in particular is extremely important to still implement in future. The office does need a comprehensive review within the next few years to remove irrelevant provisions and to match practice, and although I was unable to complete the process, a framework for conducting the review will be provided to my successor to see through should they choose.

3. Miscellaneous

Day-to-day in the External office encompasses so many different facets and duties, and while some are so miniscule that they need not be mentioned here, it is important to mention several other initiatives that have begun in the office.

**Immigration:** An issue that is usually placed in the VP Academic’s portfolio, I have been working with the University & Government Relations Advisor around changes to Canada’s immigration system, with a focus on the granting and regulation of study permits. Changes are being announced to the program in mid-2014, and it will be key that the AMS continues to monitor this file to ensure student’s right to privacy is respected.

**UNECORN + SLCC:** The two committees that I sit on, UNECORN (University + External Relations Committee) and SLCC (Student Life and Communications Committee) have met several times over the course of my term to date. Most of my offices work is sent to UNECORN for review and passage, however, SLCC has some great potential to assist with our upcoming campaigns and lobbying initiatives.

**Meetings:** Most of my days are spent in different meetings with a range of organizations. To date, I have met with representatives from the university administration, City of Vancouver, the BC Liberals, BC NDP, BC Greens, BC Conservatives, as well as from other student unions including Kwantlen, SFU, UBC-O, UNBC, UFV, and UVic, mostly through monthly meetings with the ABCS.