



## MEMO

**From:** Tanner Bokor, AMS President  
**To:** AMS Council  
**C.C.:** Ross Horton, General Manager  
Daniel Levangie, Executive Director  
Abby Blinch, Communications Manager  
**Date:** March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
**Subject:** Communications Plan for Upcoming BDS Referendum

### Introduction

On February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a petition was received at the AMS offices to be sent for referendum. The petition was then sent to Davis LLP, the AMS's legal counsel, to audit the signatures against the AMS's active membership list to ensure that the bylaw-required 1,000 signature threshold had been met. Upon the conclusion of the audit, Davis LLP informed the AMS Executive that the petition had only received 994 signatures, and the AMS Executive informed the petitioning party and opposition of the need for six more verified signatures. These signatures were collected on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015, and the AMS Council met to discuss their stance and position on the proposed question that evening.

### Petitioned Question

The question that was requested by the membership to be sent to referendum is as follows:

*"Do you support your student union (AMS) in boycotting products and divesting from companies that support Israeli war crimes, illegal occupation and the oppression of Palestinians?"*

### Motions In Effect

The following motions were approved at the March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015 AMS Council meeting and were the building blocks of how the Executive Committee moved forward on developing a communications plan. These motions are stated as below:

### Position of the Society

WHEREAS the topic of Palestine-Israel relations is often divisive and polarizing; and

WHEREAS the president of UBC has urged all members of the UBC community to commit to the free, respectful expression of ideas; and

WHEREAS the adoption of positions regarding international relations is outside the scope of the Alma Mater Society's (AMS) purposes as outlined in its Constitution;

WHEREAS the AMS has currently no official position on foreign policy;

BIRT the AMS supports the ideals of a well-informed student body, robust debate, and students' right to learn in a safe space;

BIFRT the AMS supports the free, respectful expression of ideas to better engage and educate its members on complex and controversial issues and will commit to this goal;

BIFRT the AMS promotes a safe and discriminatory free community for all its members;

BIFRT the AMS endorses any vote but a yes vote, as one of the AMS' primary objectives, as outlined in the AMS Constitution, is to promote unity and goodwill amongst its members.

### **Creation of Safe Spaces & Communications Plan Direction**

BIRT that AMS Council not launch a full campaign and further direct the Executive committee to release a single communication statement that states the AMS's stance on the BDS referendum; and

BIFRT that AMS Council direct the Executive Committee to develop a comprehensive plan for the creation of open and safe spaces of dialogue prior to and during the referendum period; and

BIFRT this communication statement include the full motion that was passed on the March 4th meeting of AMS Council.

### **Referendum Dates**

BIRT Council recommends that the President announce the referendum dates to begin on the week of March 23rd to March 27<sup>th</sup>

### ***Communications Plan***

Per Council's request, the Executive Committee proposes to send two communications: the first communication will be sent on Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015 via the AMS's website and social media feeds, and will contain the contents of AMS Council's position statement in full, with a brief introduction on responsible debate, and a simplified version of Council's statement; the post will also link to a page on the AMS's website with included resources for students, information on BDS, and a FAQ on the referendum and the position of Council. The position of Council will only be shared via the AMS's website and social media streams.

The Elections Committee will be responsible for informing students of the referendum dates, question, and information on both the Yes and No committees.

These draft communications can be viewed in Appendix A.

### ***Events & Safe Spaces***

The Executive Committee is exploring possible event formats that would ensure balanced and equal spaces for both sides of the issue to enter into discussion with students, while creating a safe and respectful environment. The Executive Projects Assistant, in collaboration with the VP Academic, VP Admin, Executive Director, Events Manager, Communications Manager, and President, and with

assistance from academic resources at UBC, will develop an event format to be deployed during the voting period. This will further be discussed by the Working Group, which is open to AMS Council to attend and provide their insight.

### ***Communications Protocols***

The AMS President is the spokesperson for the Society. They represent the Society and are responsible for accurate and consistent messaging. For communications on behalf of the AMS on this issue, there will be the following division of responsibilities:

***Elections Administrator*** – Elections procedures, voting information, procedural referendum questions  
***Vice-President, Academic & University Affairs*** – University relationship, campus services available to students  
***Vice-President, Administration*** – Club activity, building-related matters  
***AMS President*** – Position of Council

Requests that do not fall within this division, the Communications Manager will advise the President who should speak on the issue.

For the purposes of this referendum, Constituency Presidents are authorized to speak on behalf of their own constituency, so long as the AMS President is informed of the interview taking place. Groups may seek the support of the AMS Communications Manager ([communications@ams.ubc.ca](mailto:communications@ams.ubc.ca)) for assistance on key messaging, interview coordination, and background briefing.

### ***Media Release Protocol***

The President and Communications Manager are responsible for creating media releases and sending them to appropriate external and campus media. Should a media release need to be disseminated in a timely manner, the Communications Manager and President will determine a deadline in which content must be provided.

If a media release concerns a contentious issue, the media release will be circulated to the executives, University & Government Relations Advisor, Executive Director, and appropriate staff, with a deadline (usually a few hours) for input. Due to the time-sensitive nature of media releases, if the Communications Manager and President do not receive input from relevant parties by the deadline, the media release will be sent out regardless.

### ***Working Group***

A Working Group will be created, beginning to meet on Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, to manage the day-to-day elements of the referendum communications process, though a majority of this work will be conducted by the AMS President, given that a limited communications plan requires little coordination. The members of the Working Group are the President, Executive Director, Communications Manager, VP Academic, and VP Admin. Other members of staff and Council may attend as desired.

The executive duties are divided as follows:

**VP Administration:** Responsible for working with the clubs (SPHR, Hillel BC, Israel on Campus), and for the SUB (bookings, postering policies, etc.)

**VP External:** Our external face to government, managing relationships municipally, provincially, and federally.

**VP Academic & University Affairs:** Managing our relationships with the University, Faculty Association, RCMP, Campus Security, and on campus unions, as well as with the Residence Hall Association

**VP Finance:** Responsible for overseeing expenditures for the Yes and No committees, and for the executive/Council on this issue

**President:** Traffic control of the various portfolios, communications strategy and plan, media requests, liaising with the Ombudsperson and

**Executive Director:** Support to all executives and council, and working with other staff to bring in resources to support the work of the society on this issue

### **Conclusion**

Given AMS Council's position and directions to balance being a neutral facilitator with the stance of Council, we believe that this proposal adequately permits the AMS to fulfill both obligations. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the AMS President at [president@ams.ubc.ca](mailto:president@ams.ubc.ca).

Sincerely,



Tanner Bokor  
President  
Alma Mater Society of UBC Vancouver

## Appendix A – Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the referendum question?

"Do you support your student union (AMS) in boycotting products and divesting from companies that support Israeli war crimes, illegal occupation and the oppression of Palestinians?"

### Why is this question on the upcoming AMS election ballot?

On March 4, a UBC student provided the AMS with a petition with signatures of 1,000 active AMS members requesting the proposed question to be on the upcoming ballot. Any student may collect 1,000 signatures to place a referendum question on a ballot for UBC students to vote on

### Does the AMS have to run this question?

Per AMS bylaws, so long as the petition has met the threshold and the question itself is not of an ambiguous nature, the AMS is required to put forward the question to the membership, and we believe that if students feel an issue should be sent to the membership, that we create the spaces to do so.

### What is the AMS's position on this referendum?

AMS Council at their March 4, meeting approved a recommendation to students to vote anything but yes on the question for the following reasons:

The AMS supports the ideals of a well-informed student body, robust debate, and students' right to learn in a safe space. We support the free, respectful expression of ideas to better engage and educate its members on complex and controversial issues. The AMS promotes a safe and discriminatory free community for all its members and endorses any vote but a yes vote, as one of the AMS' primary objectives, as outlined in the AMS Constitution, is to promote unity and goodwill amongst its members.

You can read more about the position of Council in its [entirety here](#).

**Comment [C1]:** Highlighting the word yes in quotations means anyone who scans this document will think the AMS is endorsing a yes vote.

### Where do I go for support if I feel affected by this question?

Recognizing the sensitivity of this issue, there are a number of resources within the AMS and the UBC community that are being made available to receive support. These resources include:

- UBC Counselling Services: 604-822-3811, 1847 East Mall, Room 1040
- Vancouver Crisis Line: 1-800-784-2433
- Campus Security: 604-822-2222
- AMS Ombudsperson – [assist@ams.ubc.ca](mailto:assist@ams.ubc.ca)
- UBC Ombudsperson – [ombuds.office@ubc.ca](mailto:ombuds.office@ubc.ca)
- UBC Equity & Inclusion Office - [equity@equity.ubc.ca](mailto:equity@equity.ubc.ca)

**Comment [C2]:** <http://www.ams.ubc.ca/student-society/elections-2/referendums/>

### Will the AMS be holding any discussions or forums on this topic?

Yes. The AMS is committed to academic freedom and responsible debate, and is here to act as a facilitator for open dialogue in a safe and respectful environment. Check back soon for more information.

### When and where can I vote on this referendum?

Voting takes place online between March 23-27. You will receive an email letting you know when the polls open. There will also be voting booths setup around campus.

## Appendix B – Council Statement on the Referendum

On March 4, 2015, AMS Council held an extraordinary council meeting to discuss our position on a petition-initiated referendum question. The question is as follows:

“Do you support your student union (AMS) in boycotting products and divesting from companies that support Israeli war crimes, illegal occupation and the oppression of Palestinians?”

The AMS has a long and proud history of encouraging students to exercise their civic responsibility, dating back to our foundation. For 100 years, UBC students have put forward referendum questions on everything from the legalization of marijuana to, most recently, divestment from fossil fuels. In all such cases, the AMS aims to act as the facilitator and administrator of a fair process and works to provide equal opportunities to all parties.

The AMS supports the ideals of a well-informed student body, robust debate, and students’ right to learn in a safe space. The AMS supports the free, respectful expression of ideas to better engage and educate members on complex and controversial issues. The AMS promotes a safe and discrimination free community for all its members and has elected to endorse “any vote but a yes” vote. This stance is based on one of the AMS’ primary objectives, as outlined in the AMS constitution, to promote unity and goodwill amongst its members.

The purpose of a university is to be a space for open discussion and the free exchange of ideas. Sometimes, this means exploring topics that are uncomfortable, controversial, and sensitive. We embrace difficult conversations as scholars and members of the UBC community and we will continue to do so, on this topic and surely many others to come.

The AMS encourages all students to educate themselves on both sides of this debate, seek out academic resources, and engage in discussion with an open mind, a critical eye and with respect. The referendum will be held from March 23-27, and more information, including the full text of the motions passed at AMS Council, can be found online at <http://www.ams.ubc.ca/studentsociety/elections-2/referendums/>

**Comment [C3]:** This is probably the best place to keep the information.

If anyone feels they need support, please reach out to the resources below:

- UBC Counselling Services: 604-822-3811, 1847 East Mall, Room 1040
- Vancouver Crisis Line: 1-800-784-2433
- Campus Security: 604-822-2222
- AMS Ombudsperson – [assist@ams.ubc.ca](mailto:assist@ams.ubc.ca)
- UBC Ombudsperson – [ombuds.office@ubc.ca](mailto:ombuds.office@ubc.ca)
- UBC Equity & Inclusion Office - [equity@equity.ubc.ca](mailto:equity@equity.ubc.ca)