

EQUITY CAUCUS REVIEW

Background

The Alma Mater Society's (AMS) 2016 Governance Review raised the concern that some groups on campus felt they were not adequately represented by Council. Section 3.3.2 of the Governance Review made eight recommendations to improve the operational efficacy of Council. Based upon these recommendations, the Student Issues Caucus and Equity Caucus were ideated as working groups of the AMS Advocacy Committee and AMS Student Life Committee respectively.

For two years, the AMS encountered difficulties in populating the Equity Caucus and getting its work off the ground. To take part in the Caucus, students were asked to submit cover letters, resumes, and to come speak at Advocacy Committee. During this time, the AMS recognized that these were significant barriers to participation and lowered the amount of information needed. Last year, the VP External office also took a more proactive approach in reaching out to equity-seeking student communities to promote the Caucus.

In 2018, the AMS Advocacy Committee determined that in order for this endeavor to be successful, significant changes were necessary. Through consultation with the AMS Executives and AMS Policy Advisor, it was proposed that the membership should be more open and the work of the Caucus should be easily accessible to anyone who wants to participate. It was felt that this would promote the participation of a larger group of students and would help better serve the goal of the Equity Caucus.

Initial Consultation

During Term 1, the VP External office underwent consultation with the Resource Groups and UBC's Equity and Inclusion Office in order to better inform the terms of reference of the Caucus. The process included group discussions about the revamping of this structure and going through the terms of reference to find gaps to fill and opportunities to expand upon.

The consultation highlighted the following important issues to address:

- Membership
 - How do we ensure that the scope isn't too narrow that it won't allow for a multitude of voices of students from different marginalized communities to participate or that it doesn't recognize the intersectionality of people's identities?
 - How do we ensure that the scope isn't so large that we aren't able to address the concerns of students from specific identity groups?
- Accountability
 - If this is an informal structure within the AMS, how can we ensure that the work/information is flowing to other, formal bodies of Council and that there is accountability for the actions being undertaken?
- Engagement
 - Does the business of this Caucus give students enough resources/information to work with that they would see how their work tangibly affects the AMS?

- How do we ensure that information about the Caucus and the work it's doing is easily accessible to the student body?

These concerns raised issues around whether a “caucus” structure would be the best way forward, especially considering that students were not a part of the ideation of this structure initially. There was also conversation about how other work on equity is being undertaken by the AMS beyond just the creation of this structure.

The VP External office has also been doing additional research into equity structures at other student unions and post-secondary institutions that will be shared with Advocacy Committee.

Proposal

A commitment to equity and inclusion in the AMS necessitates a broader conversation with the student body and internally. The purpose of creating an Equity Caucus structure is to provide students from marginalized communities to have their voices included within the structures, advocacy, and operations of the AMS. If we are dedicated to this outcome, we must do the work necessary to reach out to our membership from the onset of this process to collaboratively create a plan of action.

Engaging with equity-seeking student groups on a predetermined structure is not enough. It may be more fruitful for the AMS to take steps back in this process and start from an early, consultative phase on a broader inquiry into how the AMS can be a more equitable organization.

Next Steps

1. Get initial feedback from underrepresented student groups on engagement moving forward
2. Present at AMS Council on the shifting direction of this work and a timeline
3. Create a formal body (ex. a working group under Advocacy Committee) to drive this work throughout the summer
 - a. Creating the framework for the plan, beginning early engagement with on-campus groups, preparing engagement for broader consultation in the Fall
4. Host a town hall or pop-up sessions to engage our membership on the framework of the plan
5. Integrate feedback to create the full plan
6. Host a second engagement session to provide feedback on plan
7. Finalize the document
8. Begin implementation plan

Timeline

March – April	1 – 2
May – August	3
September	4
October	5
November	6 – 7
December	7 – 8

Motion

BIRT AMS Advocacy Committee strike an Equity Plan Working Group and present a finalized document to AMS Council by the end of November.