

Student Societies Summit

Meeting #6 – Governing Council Chambers – Jan 15, 2014

Attendance:

Faculty Summit Members: Prof. Joe Desloges (Chair), Prof. Donald Ainslie, Prof. Linda White, Prof. Graham White

Student Participants: Yolen Bollo-Kamara (UTSU), Anges So (UTSU), Mauricio Curbelo (EngSoc), Mary Stefanidis (ICSS), Anthony O'Brien (PHEUA), Alex Zappone (SMCSU), Benjamin Crase (TCM), Maha Naqi (TCM), David Bastien (MedSoc), Ryan Phillips (UCLit), Rhys Smith (WCSA), Michael Amiraslani (WCSA)

Administration: Prof. Jill Matus (Vice Provost, Students & First-Entry Divisions), David Newman (Director, Student Life), Meredith Strong (Director, Office of the Vice-Provost, Students & Student Policy Advisor)

Regrets: Teresa Maida (STU), Brendan Stevens (SLS), Nishi Kumar (UCLit)

Welcome

Prof. Desloges welcomed all participants to the New Year and the 6th meeting of the Summit. Participants were informed that, although initially the faculty members were not meeting with individual student societies outside of the Summit meetings, they could now schedule meetings with the faculty members. The rationale for this change was to provide additional opportunities for input and to share ideas on what will help facilitate progress in the Summit agenda. Meeting requests should be directed to Prof. Desloges.

Report back from Dec 11 breakout group discussions:

Reporters/recorders from each breakout group were reminded, prior to the meeting, to bring the discussion notes from their respective groups to share the details more fulsomely around the following question.

Over the course of the past several meeting, in what ways have your views changed regarding:

- a) UofT student governance structure;
- b) Definitions of good governance; and
- c) Representation and roles?

The following points were shared by each group.

Group 1

- Composition of a Board of Directors needs to be representative of its membership
- UTSU divisional representatives have no formal link to divisional student societies
- Communication is a key issue
- No clear mechanisms exist to allow fee diversion or secession
- Good governance should understand and respond to what students want
- Differing terms or lengths of study for some groups make representation challenging
- Low voter turnout makes democracy questionable

Group 2

- Different student societies have different constitutions and rules, making it challenging to achieve agreement on matters of conflict, including referenda, bylaws, and elections
- Communication is currently not effective and consultation is not formalized into decision-making processes

Group 3

- Diverse opinions regarding fee diversion and secession continue
- Continued discussion over services and supports provided at both the central and local levels
- Consideration to how students in professional faculties might work together

Group 4

- There are many issues (e.g., social justice) that can be identified as priorities for a collective central student organization
- Good governance is about accountability to members
- There is benefit to strong and defined linkages between divisional groups and a central group

Participants were invited to discuss these points further, focusing on the implications of the current structure. The following high-level points were raised:

- Some feel changing structure won't deal with issues of non-members (i.e., U of T students) participating in election processes
- A more formalized relationship between the UTSU and divisional societies was offered as a potential option
- EngSoc and MedSoc both indicated that, even if there were significant reforms to structures and procedures, a central student society cannot effectively represent their members' interests and needs
- Some participants further raised the idea that students in professional faculties might have distinct interests
- A detailed conversation ensued over many participants highlighting their concerns when student societies use external networks and resources to strengthen the election campaigns of specific individuals or slates
 - Faculty members requested further clarification on this issue to get a better understanding on campaign practices and the perception of fairness by using external resources; there remains disagreement among participants as to whether or not this practice should be allowed

Proposed structure for next rounds of discussion

Participants were asked to collect feedback from their respective constituencies on a series of specific questions around representation structure, governance, and roles for student societies to begin to develop concrete proposals. Questions to be circulated to participants in advance of the next meeting (note: questions were circulated through the agenda for the next meeting).

Participants were asked to give deep consideration to the proposed questions as these responses will be used to form the foundation of the next steps in the Summit process.

Next Meetings

The following dates/times are tentatively booked for the next meetings. The Office of the Vice-Provost, Students & First-Entry Divisions will poll student participants to ensure that maximum representation can take place.

Monday, January 27 1:00-3:00pm
Monday, February 10 2:00-4:00pm
Wednesday, March 5 1:00-3:00pm
Thursday, March 13 10:00-12:00pm