

## Student Societies Summit

**Meeting #2 – October 25, 2013, Croft Chapter House, University College**

### **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), Raymond Noronha (UTMSU), Dylan Chavin Smith (ASSU), Mauricio Curbelo (EngSoc), Thomas Santerre (EngSoc), Mary Stefanidis (ICSS), David Bastien (MedSoc), Ashkan Azimi (NCSC), Craig Maniscalco (NCSC), Anthony O'Brien (PHEUA), Alex Zappone (SMCSU), Brendan Stevens (SLS), Peter Flynn (SLS), Benjamin Crase (TCM), Maha Naqi (TCM), Nishi Kumar (UCLit), Jelena Savic (VUSAC), Zack Medow (VUSAC), Rhys Smith (WCSA)

**Administration:** Prof. Jill Matus (Vice Provost, Students & First-Entry Divisions) Prof. Mark McGowan, David Newman

**Regrets:** Prof. Brian Langille, Kim Blakely (MedSoc), Teresa Maida (STU), Ryan Phillips (UCLit)

### **Welcome**

Prof. Desloges welcomed all the student participants and thanked University College for hosting the meeting. Participants who were unable to attend the first meeting were asked to introduce themselves to the group. The Chair also shared that a number of requests have been received, including from various media outlets, to sit in on the meetings of the Summit, all of which have been turned down. Only official participants are invited to these meetings. There have also been reports from *The Varsity* that they had been in receipt of a voice recording of the full first meeting. The Chair respectfully requested that participants, in the spirit of the work that the Summit is trying to accomplish, please refrain from recording the meetings.

### **Framework for Discussion**

Participants were thanked for their candor around specific issues in the previous meeting, but were asked to take a constructivist, rather than destructivist, approach in the work of setting the foundations for these meetings. There was a commitment to return to the issues at hand after adequate focus on principles has been established.

## **Orders of Governance: Principles**

Prof. L. White provided an overview on this topic, highlighting a focus on better understanding the principles that are important amongst student societies. It was noted that many thoughtful written submissions were provided for the Summit from various groups throughout the University. Student clubs were acknowledged as distinct from student societies primarily due to the voluntary nature of their membership, whereas student societies have mandatory membership and fee collection. Prof. L. White reminded participants that in the previous meeting, there was some consideration given to the responsibilities of student societies, which included services delivered, for example; however, the meaning and value behind these services was not explored. In considering the discussion question, participants were asked to consider principles of good governance, what they would like to see reflective of their own organization, and what they would tolerate from other organizations. Many possibilities exist in a system or structure, which might include a larger representative central group, complete subsidiarity (services and representation should be provided by the government level as close to the people as feasible), or anywhere in between, including a system of federalism where roles are defined at different levels. Participants were also asked to engage in the following discussion with a view that they are responsible for representing students whose memberships with the student societies are mandatory.

***Discussion Question: If starting from scratch and working from a blank slate, what would be the ideal undergraduate student society governance structure at the University of Toronto? What principles would you prioritize (consider 3)?***

Various student societies highlighted the following values and roles of their organizations:

- Student societies should be representative of their student constituent interests and advocate on their behalf. Some felt that it was necessary to have both central and local representative bodies for all students, while others felt that the interests of their students are adequately represented by their local student society.
- Student societies are accountable to their constituents, particularly in consideration of mandatory fee collection. They should do so by ensuring they have good governance, effective representation, and good fiscal management.
- Student life, community building, and student engagement (academic and social) were highlighted as central to the functioning of student societies.
- Many student societies recognized their work and commitment to equity and diversity within their communities as important.

- Students within smaller and more cohesive student societies are more likely to be happy and satisfied with their respective organizations.
- Student societies should consider the will of their constituents. Annual General Meetings (AGMs) should be considered the highest decision-making body.
- Effective communication is key to successful governance structures.
- Direct democracy, where students have the opportunity, in a simplified way, to participate in decision-making
- Elections need to have processes that are impartial, perhaps including a student arbitration committee.

During discussion on this topic, a number of interjected questions from the Faculty Summit Members were posed, who were seeking clarification on specific points made by participants. The following probing questions were included throughout the discussion:

*How do student societies support diversity within?*

- Diversity within respective student societies can effectively be supported through a clubs structure
- Some representatives identified a system of federalism as ideal

*Are divisional student societies represented on the UTSU? How are divisional student societies able to vocalize their concerns when they feel that UTSU is not representing their interests?*

- Some concerns were raised over the interpretation of UTSU Bylaw 15 and how it is used in practice by the Elections and Referenda Committee.
- Some groups are concerned that the UTSU Board of Directors is not accountable to the divisions that they represent.
- UTSU representatives from each division generally have no formal relationship with the divisional student society except in cases where the divisional society has added those positions to their executive teams.
- Some groups want UTSU to be more democratic and undertake greater electoral reforms.
- UTSU has undertaken reform through the Policy Committee and have made recommendations on changes (e.g., online voting, full-time student status for UTSU executives, etc.).
- Divisional societies have ex-officio non-voting seats on the UTSU Board of Directors.

- Some divisional societies also represent part-time and graduate students, which are beyond the scope of UTSU.
- Some divisional societies have no coordination with UTSU activities.

Prof. L. White highlighted several issues that have been identified throughout the discussion including:

- Student societies seem to work well together when their missions are closely aligned
- Very low voter turn-out puts into question the legitimacy of various organizations
- Concerns expressed over the process for submitting motions for UTSU AGMs

It was further asked which student societies permit slates to run for their elections. A few student societies actively allow slates, others outright ban them, and others allow them with varying degrees of uptake.

### **Discussion Items for the Next Meeting of the Summit**

Participants will be provided with two questions to consider in advance of the next meeting (note: the agenda, including questions, has been posted to the Portal). Other discussion items include, if relevant, information on changes to the *Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act (NFP Act)* and if they have implications on the operation of various student societies. The Summit will also look at the University of Toronto structure and its impact on student societies.

The next 3 meetings have been tentatively scheduled on the following dates:

- November 1, 2013
- November 15, 2013
- December 11, 2013

**Meeting adjourned at 4:01pm.**