

Student Societies Summit

Meeting #3 – November 1, 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), Melissa Theodore (UTMSU), Dylan Chavin Smith (ASSU), Mauricio Curbelo (EngSoc), Mary Stefanidis (ICSS), Ryan Lamers (ICSS), Ashkan Azimi (NCSC), Craig Maniscalco (NCSC), Anthony O'Brien (PHEUA), Alex Zappone (SMCSU), Brendan Stevens (SLS), Benjamin Crase (TCM), Nishi Kumar (UCLit), Ryan Phillips (UCLit), Jelena Savic (VUSAC), Zack Medow (VUSAC)

Administration: Prof. Jill Matus (Vice-Provost, Students & First-Entry Divisions), David Newman (Office of Student Life)

Regrets: Prof. Mark McGowan, Prof. Brian Langille, Jessica Leung (FMUA), Kim Blakely (MedSoc), David Bastien (MedSoc), Teresa Maida (STU), Peter Flynn (SLS), Maha Naqi (TCM), Rhys Smith (WCSA), Michael Amiraslani (WCSA)

Welcome

Prof. Desloges welcomed all participants and thanked University College and Prof. Donald Ainslie for hosting the meeting and reception following the meeting. The Chair noted that two submissions to the Summit were received since the previous meeting; all participants were invited to review the submissions on the Portal. A general overview of the meeting was provided, which included a larger group discussion, followed by breakout groups. The groups would then report on their key discussion items to the larger group.

Brief Review of Principles Articulated So Far

The following principles (in no particular order) of the roles of student societies have been identified through submissions, notes, and discussions thus far:

- Inclusive community building
- Representation of a constituency of students
- Advocacy
- Effective feedback and communication
- Representation of various communities
- Accountability

- Good fiscal management
- Commitment to equity and diversity
- Direct democracy
- Impartial elections and electoral processes
- Facilitating interdivisional student connections and opportunities

This list was used as a foundation for the discussion.

Discussion

What is at stake if the student governance structure at U of T is fractionated (i.e., N+ student societies with no governance relation to each other)?

Participants were asked to give consideration to the question posed above, both positively and negatively. Participants identified the following points:

Negative

- Impact on clubs and levy groups that go beyond divisional boundaries
- Movement on student space initiatives would be affected (e.g., Student Commons)
- Potential problems with large scale service provision (e.g., Health and Dental Plan)
- Challenges for representation and advocacy for the larger student population with respect to administration and government
- Risk of a lack of an institutional (U of T) identity
- Not all students are connected via their local communities

Positive

- Allows for representation to happen in a more direct manner
- Clubs, services, and advocacy already exist at the local level
- Potential for collaboration on relevant issues for students in a more general way (e.g., St. George Roundtable)
- Potential for collaboration on services (e.g., Health and Dental Plan)
- Local groups can prioritize their work and resources

Summit participants were then split up into four groups to discuss the following question:

From the above starting point, and using the principles that have been discussed to date, how might the U of T student governance structure be constituted to overcome the challenges that have been identified?

Each group shared the following points:

Group #1

At an institutional level, there could be independent larger representative bodies each for full-time undergraduate students, part-time undergraduate students, and graduate students, and are further separated by campus. There would be a direct connection between the smaller divisional societies and their larger respective

bodies, providing different levels of representation. Along with representation, there would be a respective differentiation of roles (e.g., service provision).

Group #2

There could be official channels that are developed between the divisional societies and UTSU with the potential of looking into a direct democracy model. There would need to be amendments to current UTSU bylaws and work around electoral reforms to create a federated system. This would give the potential to allow larger representation from divisional societies.

Group #3

There would need to be careful consideration on how segregated representation would be justified, particularly when the current model allows for some student societies to have a much broader representation than others. If there was no formal larger representative body, each student society could collaborate on common causes and work on their own, as appropriate. The institution could be asked to consider assuming the administration of some services that are currently provided by UTSU. There would also be the potential to reconsider how clubs are supported.

Group #4

There was a general sense that there should be multiple channels of advocacy, but careful consideration should be given to what that might look like. Likely, the need would persist for a larger representative body for undergraduate and graduate students, with additional consideration for those in professional programs. There are currently two independent systems of governance, one at the UTSU level and the other at the divisional level. A new model could have direct elections from the divisional level to a larger body. In this structure, there would need to be clarity on the roles and jurisdictions at each level.

Other Business

Generally, participants supported continuing with the format of this meeting for future meetings, but requested that there be more time to participate in the larger group discussions. It was decided that the next meeting would begin with a larger group discussion of the small group feedback. The Chair thanked everyone for their participation and highlighted the next two scheduled meeting times. Participants were asked to notify the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students (vp.students@utoronto.ca) if they are able to attend.

The next 2 meetings have been scheduled on the following dates:

- November 15, 2013 (1:00pm-3:00pm)
- December 11, 2013 (10:00am-12:00pm). Lunch following the meeting to be provided by the Vice Provost, Students & First-Entry Divisions.

Meeting adjourned at 5:00pm.