



University Students' Council

Western University, Room 340, UCC Building • London, Ontario N6A 3K7 • Tel: (519) 661-3574
Fax: (519) 661 - 2094

To Whom It May Concern:

When preparing a campaign for the USC Executive, I thought it was important – if elected – to publish letters to each Executive during our terms in the hope that strategic vision could be conveyed for all parts of the team, that there would be a public record of this vision and that students could have a better grasp of what these portfolios could do. When conducting interviews to complete the first round of these letters, and simultaneously investigating election reform, it became clear that an executive composition review needed to happen.

With the will of Council, a new executive composition will exist for 2016/2017 onwards and so the purpose of these letters will change. Here, I will attempt to assess the current landscape of each executive position and how it should be adapted under the new system to be the most functional.

As I've watched the USC over the past few years, many changes to executive responsibilities have been made. We saw the executive move outside from the Board of Directors. The Campus Issues and University Affairs portfolios were changed to Internal and External. A shift from "Student Events" to "Student Programming" was considered. The VP Finance became the Secretary-Treasurer and the VP Communications became the Communications Officer, both becoming hired.

During my term, responsibilities and resources have been re-distributed between the VP Internal, External and Student Events to create the new Vice-President and Student Programs Officer. Before, in the structure of Campus Issues and University Affairs the advocacy portfolios were arranged by "files" that each executive would hold, manage and consider themselves an expert in. Then, as Internal and External the decision was made to arrange them instead as relationship based (where they advocate, not what they advocate).

Both structures have pros and cons. The original arrangement meant that stakeholders had more voices communicating at any given time, but the issues were separated by relatively arbitrary distinctions. The second setup meant that it was clear what responsibilities were given to each executive, but we lost a kind expertise that came from understanding diverse lobbying efforts.

So, why not make them one centralized advocacy machine? With redefining our focus on advocacy, however, we needed to make sure that all of the programs and events these



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portfolios cultivated continue to function. The Student Programs Officer was the next step. Develop that position to handle all programs, events and services. A student-facing and on the ground coordination of resources. I am a particular fan of the new title because of the emphasis it puts on the *programs*. The USC can and should pride itself on program development and implementation, rather than just planning events.

I am very excited to see how the upcoming elections play out and look forward to beginning a transition with my team and an incoming team to make these positions a reality!

Wishing everyone a happy 2016!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sophie Helpard".

Sophie Helpard

January 4, 2016



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To: Alex Benac, Vice-President Internal

First, congratulations on a very successful semester one! As we enter the next semester I can't help but remember this time of year and preparing to launch a slate campaign. I think we can agree that while this January will be very different, we still have some ambitious goals to complete before the end of our term.

As the Vice-President Internal, there is a vast array of responsibilities that fall under the portfolio. Perhaps more importantly, there is the weight of often being thought of as the in-house expert on certain issues – specifically managing files like mental health and well-being on campus. This is largely due to the dual role this position plays with operating the Peer Support Centre but also working with units on campus such as Student Experience Portfolio. Though this has been a natural fit for the VP Internal, I believe this reliance has limited the need for other members of the USC to be as knowledgeable or informed on such issues. My hope is that as we continue our year, and transition the next executive, we are able to educate more individuals on the complexities of mental health and well-being. When looking at an issue holistically – like we promised to do at the beginning of our terms – we can better equip an executive to come up with creative solutions to a problem.

This is especially important as the Peer Support Program is moved under the portfolio of the Student Programs Officer. This allows us to have more heads around the table when we address these issues.

The other strategy I believe is important with the portfolio is that we solidify academic advocacy as a priority. We have seen our list get longer and longer as we identify different needs of our students on campus, but I want to make sure that the USC never stops including education on that list. I am so pleased with how we've prioritized it this year by focusing on experiential learning, so this needs to continue. Working with the student senators is a crucial way to ensure student priorities are being observed and hopefully make our voice even louder. This semester, I hope we can engage the senators to make sure academic advocacy is a permanent fixture in the USC.

It's been a great year so far, and as we enter second semester it should be our goal not just to tie up loose ends but instead to add any advocacy, awareness or services that students need.

Happy 2016,

Sophie Helpard

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To: Lindsee Perkins, Vice-President External

Happy 2016! Almost unbelievable that it's already second semester. I am so happy to write this letter knowing that we've been able to implement so many goals for this portfolio already. We decided together that you wouldn't seek the role of President at OUSA and instead affect change through as the Vice-President Human Resources and Administration. Due to this, we've had you here to increase student awareness of the federal election, opening up OUSA General Assembly seats to students-at-large and focusing on the London community – taking on municipal projects that will have a big impact to students beyond this year.

We know the position of VP External will not exist in the same way next year, so an important part of our coming semester should be focusing in on what our municipal "game" is like, being able to integrate it into the Vice-President portfolio of the next executive. A large part of that will be not just working with City Councillors and the Mayor's Office like we usually do, but also utilizing our roles on London's Advisory Committees. With a seat at the table and an ability to be briefed on all of the city's business we will better know where we can use our student voice.

Another goal of the year was to reach out and build partnerships with student unions across the country. As we continue to connect with schools, researching and developing a federal advocacy strategy, we've tapped into an immense amount of best practice. You've been a leader in bringing these groups together and I know that moving forward we should continue to prioritize such efforts. As we've already seen by engaging with our local community groups, there are so many organizations out there willing to help with our goals and objectives.

As you embark on second semester, I hope that we can apply a lot of our learning from last semester and continue to fight for some of those long-term advocacy goals that require persistence.

Welcome back!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sophie Helpard".

Sophie Helpard

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To: Taryn Scripnick, Vice-President Student Events

What a year it's been so far! I'd like to acknowledge all the milestones of your role that have already been completed in first term, most notably pulling off a very successful Orientation Week. With only one semester to go until the end of this term I am excited to see your portfolio execute more well planned events and start working towards next years big programs.

Noting the recent executive composition changes, the Vice-President Student Events was given the most discussion on Council floor. I think this is because of how visible the work of the VPSE tends to be – with everything from Sophs to club members. So given the new composition, how does the USC ensure that the VP Student Events/Student Programs Officer continues to be student facing but can also take on more programs and operate them well? Logistically, it's done through increasing the responsibility of Associate Vice-Presidents and giving them the ability to expand their roles to take on more work. This strategy has been applied throughout the executive, but will have a particular impact on your role.

For the coming semester, there are certain ways to increase the strategic vision of the portfolio so that a transition to more AVP responsibility will not be a shock to the portfolio. As we have launched into an Orientation Strategic Plan, the same should happen for the rest of our core programs. We need to begin gathering data and feedback of students that participate in clubs, events and peer support programs once the transition is made so that our service delivery is meeting the needs and wants of students. I am confident that your portfolio can utilize these results to better inform the responsibilities of different individuals for the next executive.

Looking at your platform coming into this job, you've been able to complete so much and tackle challenges that you did not expect. We know the emphasis placed on the student experience at Western University and we at the University Students' Council are a big part of that. We deliver top-notch programs, but that doesn't mean that there isn't room for improvement.

Happy New Year,

Sophie Helpard

January 4, 2016



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To: Kevin Hurren, Communications Officer

Well, with the beginning of a new semester that means only four more months of being in your role – which means only four more months of fielding emails, phone calls, media requests and executive fact-finding meetings until the job is done! I want to thank you for the tireless work you've dedicated thus far.

As you know by now, the role of a “comms” executive is actually quite rare amongst other student unions. The USC has always had this role, and while it has existed in different capacities, I think the changes that were made last year have proven very beneficial. We have a highly functioning role that mirrors similar roles in other political offices. While the USC is very different than other political offices, your role allows us to be more professional and organized.

Now that we've completed a “dry-run” semester, it is safe to report the positive manner in which your role has incorporated into the executive function – particularly with project management. This is something we saw happen very organically, but that we can utilize even more. With several executive projects, the Communications Officer can take a leadership role in organizing, briefing and preparing individuals on certain projects to ensure accountability, completion and ultimately assist the President. That leadership can fill an important gap between what the executive requires and my capacity to manage work.

This can also take the form of gathering public opinion in more ways than just surveys. When we work on executive initiatives, there are few ways to actually understand to what student opinion is until after the fact. I think there's capacity to start consulting students while decisions are made, rather than just gauging experiences after a program/event. This way, it became the norm for the executive to seek a student mandate before investing significant resources into a project. This may require more resources so I think that as we also wrap up the budget process we should look at what these goals might need and plan for that in resource allocation.

Overall, we've seen great success in the work you've been able to do as Communications Officer and I hope to build more bandwidth into the job so that we can utilize the full potential of your successors.

Here's to another great semester,

Sophie Helpard

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To: Jonathan English, Secretary-Treasurer

I'm not sure if I should count our time in office in days, months, Council meetings or in stages of the budget cycle. Regardless, we're halfway through the school year! It's been impressive to see you work diligently, planning out your entire timeline of projects. I'm excited to see what changes we'll continue to make this semester with one of your biggest projects (the budget) still to be completed.

In terms of your role, it remained largely unchanged through the executive composition process because of its recent formation last year. This stability is beneficial when so much change will be happening around your role from administering elections with new positions to working on the executive budget and estimating new resource needs.

Looking at long term goals for your position, I think there are still some we can work towards this semester. One job you've taken on this year has been curating all USC policies, procedures, and by-laws to ensure that the organization is upholding past motions and mandates. This has proven to be no simple task and I think there is even more to do. I think an additional function with this project can be taking leadership in a strategic planning process. A benefit of your a-political role is that you can help administer strategic planning without influencing it with bias, and then you can observe to help the executive and the everyone in the USC to understand what changes should be made according to those plans. The biggest example is the budget and how strategic planning should be directly reflected in resource allocation depending on what students want to see. By being our resident governance and finance guru, you can help build the bridges between those two and understand not only how policy should come to be, but how it should be kept, revisited and ultimately integrated into important projects like the budget.

I appreciate your enthusiasm over so many of the intricacies of your job. As some of your biggest projects loom this semester, I look forward to seeing the outcomes that have been working to prepare.

Best for the new semester,

Sophie Helpard

January 4, 2016