

January 21, 2016

Dear Students and Colleagues,

Happy New Year! I hope you had an enjoyable break over the holiday season and have returned to campus energized to make the very best of 2016.

I was delighted to start my new year with a productive meeting between the USC Executive and my senior leadership team on January 11. We had a helpful discussion about many issues important to students and I was pleased to see the meeting so well attended.

This annual meeting is an opportunity for the USC, on behalf of undergraduate students, to continue their conversation with senior administration with regard to ongoing student priorities, and to also bring emerging issues to the table where they can be explored in an open forum. I commend the USC for its continued focus on core academic matters important to students and appreciate the work of USC President Sophie Helpard and her team in helping to enhance the educational experience at Western.

A few of the issues we discussed were rapid transit, online course evaluations and student priorities. Alex Benac, VP Internal, also shared a personal story about the challenges faced by a black Muslim student he recently met at the USC office. It was a good reminder that while there are many people on campus who specialize in helping students with a wide range of issues, we all have a responsibility in creating a welcoming, inclusive and supportive community.

On rapid transit, we agreed that it is important for the City and the University to have a rapid transit model that works for students, staff and faculty, by ensuring fast, safe service to campus. We also need to respect the beauty of our campus, as well as our safety, academic and research mandates. And we need to rationalize transit routes with a view to reducing traffic through campus over time. The optimal route needs to be decided by our community and we look forward to working with the USC, students, staff, faculty and the City on this project.

We have been working closely with many on campus, including students, in implementing the online delivery of course evaluations. I am pleased to note that we have software in the works, we are reviewing the evaluation itself, and expect to have a new and improved system tested this summer for implementation in Fall 2016. Stay tuned for updates on this important initiative.

Sophie and her Executive team also highlighted their advocacy priorities related to ancillary fees, co-curricular learning and TA training. We know students have a key interest in how this money is spent and what services are provided, and we recognize that in uncertain economic times, there is unlikely to be an increase in funding coming from the Province. We agreed to continue this conversation and move forward together, balancing both the services students need and want with the money available for these services.

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We also spoke about students' desire for more international and experiential learning opportunities being available for course credit, as part of the curriculum. We discussed progress made on this issue and agreed to continue working together with our entire community to increase these opportunities for our students, both graduate and undergraduate.

Graduate student TAs play an important role in the delivery of our undergraduate programs and they have a significant impact on the learning experiences of our students. We heard that undergraduate students are very supportive of training opportunities for our TAs to further enrich the learning experience of undergraduate students and the professional development of our graduate students. We look forward to working with our community to support these shared interests and benefits.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amit Chakma', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Amit Chakma
President & Vice-Chancellor

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