



TEAM SOPHIE PLATFORM REVIEW

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL 2015/2016



PREFACE

Making it easier to be a student. These words opened the Team Sophie platform and each point following attempted to accomplish just that. This report is a review of the platform, categorizing each point as **Complete**, **Ongoing** and **Incomplete** as of 2015’s close. **Complete** refers to projects or initiatives that have been successfully accomplished or are scheduled to be completed in early 2016. **Ongoing** refers to projects that are still active but more work will be done second term and completion is still a priority. **Incomplete** refers to projects where no or little future work is scheduled and the completion is no longer a priority. Many of the advocacy points are categorized as ongoing, as it often takes more than one year to both decide and implement university policy or budget changes.

If you have any questions on the review please contact the USC’s Communications Officer at communications@westernusc.ca.



SUMMARY



COMPLETE



ONGOING



INCOMPLETE

- MOVING THE FALL READING BREAK TO THANKSGIVING
- BETTER LIBRARY HOURS DURING READING WEEK
- USE THE WAVE FOR STUDY SPACE DURING EXAMS
- RELEASE EXAM SCHEDULES EARLIER
- FOCUS ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
- COMMENDING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
- COURSE SYLLABUS ENHANCEMENT
- ADVOCATE FOR UNDERGRAD STUDENTS TO BE ON TENURE BOARD
- IMPROVING FOOD OPTIONS
- REASSESS SPOKE SERVICE
- ENHANCED SAO
- FULL O-WEEK
- EXPANDED SPOKE PATIO THE FIRST WEEK BACK
- ASSESSING SEPTEMBER AND CLUBS WEEK
- BETTER DEAL ON PARKING
- MAKE THE MUSTANG EXPRESS WORK FOR STUDENTS
- KING'S/BRESCIA BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT
- END OF THE YEAR FOODFEST WITH LOCAL LONDON VENDORS
- AMEND THE 3 IN 23 EXAM POLICY
- EXAM ACCOMMODATION FOR MENTAL WELLNESS GROUNDS
- MENTAL HEALTH MAP ON OWL
- PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON MENTAL WELLNESS
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- THE PEER SUPPORT CENTRE RENEWAL
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- INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS COLLECTIVE
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- WEEKLY RESIDENCE VISITS
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MOVING FALL READING BREAK TO THANKSGIVING

With the university's academic calendar set almost a year in advance, the 2015 reading break could not be moved to the Thanksgiving long weekend. However, we've been working with the student senators to ensure this remains a priority and a topic at senate. Additionally, a USC survey is currently asking students what they think about the reading break schedule. We plan on using these results to apply more pressure on the university to look at changing the dates.

BETTER LIBRARY HOURS DURING READING WEEK

By opening up other spaces on campus for studying – such as the USC conference rooms – this became less of a priority this term. However, it is still something we're looking into pushing for next term.

USE THE WAVE FOR STUDY SPACE DURING EXAMS

Because of late term scheduling conflicts at the Wave, we weren't able to expand hours for the first-term exams. Looking ahead to second-term we'll better ensure these kinds of scheduling issues can be addressed earlier and the Wave can be left open for study purposes.

RELEASE EXAM SCHEDULES EARLIER

After coordinating with the university's Office of the Registrar, who administer the exam scheduling system, it was determined that in order for exam dates to be released earlier they would need an additional staff member. As such, when the university's budget comes to senate next term we will be including this resource allocation as one of our student-focused recommendations.

FOCUS ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

First, we've been modelling scholarships and bursaries geared towards experiential or work-integrated learning. Earlier this year we created the Experiential Learning Endowment, granting students resources to take advantage of experiential learning opportunities. On the Student Services Committee we were successful in getting Western to hire a global experiential learning coordinator to connect students with abroad programs. More locally, we were able to get work-integrated learning as one of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance top three priorities to push for at Queen's Park. Finally, we're finishing an advocacy paper on internships programs in non-STEM faculties and working with Western to implement such a program next term.

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COMMENDING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In tandem with the above changes, we just launched the President's Medal of Innovation in Teaching to do our part to incentivize professors towards new teaching methods and are currently looking for nominations. Instructors will still require support from the university to provide such programs, so we'll continue to remind Western's administration how important an investment in that support is.

COURSE SYLLABUS ENHANCEMENT

Though our initial goal was to include mental health information in each course syllabus, the university took a hard stance against this explaining that course syllabi should only contain standard academic information directly related to the curriculum. As an alternative, we were able to build and design a mental health tab on OWL. More information on this is in the "mental health map on OWL" description below.

ADVOCATE FOR UNDERGRAD STUDENTS TO BE ON TENURE BOARD

Early on this was a point identified as likely not going to happen this year. However, it was still important for us to put it on the university's radar and, although they'd argue students aren't experienced enough to sit on these committees, this is something we'll continue to advocate for.

IMPROVING FOOD OPTIONS

This year the Wave and Spoke have added more vegan, gluten free and vegetarian options to their menus. Additionally, a culturally diverse special menu has been through rotation at the Wave and a second round will come to the restaurant next term. Spoke coffee has been added to the Wave and, finally, we've been able to host food interaction events for students in the Wave kitchen to get a better idea of what students like and don't like.

REASSESS SPOKE SERVICE

At the Spoke, we've reviewed the service and made changes to the point of sale system so students have to wait less to get the food in their hands - an efficiency change that has also allowed the Spoke to save money. The Spoke has also become fair trade, and we've been a part of the committee to make the entire campus fair trade this year.

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ENHANCED SAO

We reached out to staff in the Student Success Center early in the summer to improve the USC's engagement with Summer Academic Orientation. As such, we were able to review and update involvement info going out to students, as well as getting newly created USC videos to play for each incoming student as part of their orientation. Finally, members of the executive were scheduled to speak at the opening reception for family and friends of incoming students.

FULL O-WEEK

Though it was too late to change the academic calendar this year to allow for a full orientation week, no scheduled classes during that time will be a major part of the orientation strategic plan – a project launched this year by the USC to think about the future of orientation. Even without a full week this year we added a Soph care station and more complimentary programming to all main-stage events.

EXPANDED SPOKE PATIO THE FIRST WEEK BACK

Unfortunately, there is a clause in our liquor licence that requires a special application when serving alcohol outside of approved venues. The USC only has a certain number of these special applications a year and we wanted to save them so we could serve alcohol at events like concerts in the Mustang Lounge and on UC Hill for Homecoming.

ASSESSING SEPTEMBER AND CLUBS WEEK

This year we re-launched the USC's involvement compass, with newly added groups and questions, to better help students navigate the many involvement opportunities. Further, we rearranged the set-up of clubs week so that rather than alphabetically, club booths were sorted by theme (charitable, political, etc.). Similarly, for Volunteer Week and Job Fair we differentiated internal/on-campus and external/off-campus involvements.

BETTER DEAL ON PARKING

We've been working with the university's Sustainability Office as well as Western's Vice-President, Resources & Operations to put car share spaces on campus. These spots will open more spaces in other parking lots and, if students want to participate in a car share program, they don't have to pay for parking. Right now, five or six slots are allotted to be added and a contract will be signed next term.

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MAKE THE MUSTANG EXPRESS WORK FOR STUDENTS

A review of the shuttle service has just ended, and a subsequent report has been prepared to be published in early 2016. Exam shuttles are also on track and, to provide increased service, shuttles will be taking students home from major second-term events such as Charity Ball, January Soph Pub and Purple Frost.

KING'S/BRESCIA BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

To make information about these shuttles and schedules more accessible, we've been coordinating with the Western App moderators and the affiliate shuttle organizers to add all the times to the Western App's bus section. These changes are scheduled to take place early 2016.

END OF THE YEAR FOODFEST WITH LOCAL LONDON VENDORS

Rather than wait the entire year to enjoy some tasty treats, we've made it a priority to integrate food as much as possible in planning major USC events. Notably, we've been able to offer complimentary and purchasable food at both Beerfest and Homecoming. We look forward to offering even more food options at events next term.

AMEND THE 3 IN 23 EXAM POLICY

We've had several meetings with Western's Vice Provost of Academic Programs about expanding this accommodation policy. It has been made a priority with the student senators as well, and although it makes it harder to schedule exams, we're committed to continue lobbying the university for this change.

EXAM ACCOMMODATION FOR MENTAL WELLNESS GROUNDS

Western's associate deans have endorsed the USC's recommendations on mental wellness accommodations and next term these changes will come before the senate. With the support of the associate deans and our earlier advocacy efforts we're optimistic of senate's approval.

MENTAL HEALTH MAP ON OWL

The USC came forward to administration asking for a comprehensive guide to mental health resources on campus and next term it will be published on OWL for all students. This guide details descriptions, hours of operations, contact information and - perhaps most uniquely - differentiation information helping students find the exact help they're looking for (i.e. the difference between a psychiatrist and a psychotherapist).

PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON MENTAL WELLNESS

Rather than preparing a report on mental health resources just for university administration, we found it more relevant to do this work for students in the form of the mental health map on OWL. As detailed above, this guide will include wellness operations on campus and differentiate between the services. We hope to use this guide to continue finding holes in the system where students feel unsupported or where services are inaccessible.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS TALKS

In addition to making progress for mental health education and resources on campus, we've been connecting with other student unions to continue this work. As part of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, we were able to get mental wellness as a secondary advocacy priority. We've also been communicating with non-OUSA schools to broaden this conversation. Next term we'll be putting together a report on what's happening at other institutions concerning mental health and wellness.

THE PEER SUPPORT CENTRE RENEWAL

Earlier this year, we reopened the Peer Support Centre with both a new space and revitalized program. This includes improved recruitment and training of Peer Support volunteers, an expanded resource library (with updated records and in various languages), a full-time psychotherapist from Western's Student Development Centre and a new way to track student intake.

FOCUS ON LONDON

In December, we signed a principles of collaboration and commitment document with leadership in the city, including the mayor, outlining expectations and relationships between the USC and the city. USC executives and representatives have attended more city council meetings this year and, as such, we've been able to create new relationships and develop growing ones.

IMPROVED LTC

The London Transit Commission has been a great partner this year and we've been able to implement many of the service improvements brought forward earlier this year such as more buses on the road and different or new routes. However, to ensure LTC continues working for students we've garnered more student feedback through forums where students can give suggestions. Finally, the USC has also been a major voice in the discussion about bringing rapid transit and light-rail transit to London.

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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE TICKETING

To introduce a restorative justice ticketing program to London we've created a working group comprised of representatives from the city, the police and us. This working group has been putting together a plan for how this program could work and a pilot version will be implemented next term.

IMPROVING ADVISORY COMMITTEE OUTCOMES

The USC has earned a seat on four of the city's advisory committees. This year, we've really engaged with the transit advisory committee and due to this, in part, the city council unanimously approved recommendations about rapid transit and light-rail transit. Next term, we want to work on the other committees to a similar extent and empower each student committee member to contribute.

GROWING EARLY OUTREACH CONFERENCE

The conference has become a major event in the community and continues to show elementary school students the promise of postsecondary education. This year, we've grown the conference to include more families from Middlesex County as well as London - going from 200 students last year to a goal of 300 students. Also, we've connected with other universities to propose they hold similar conferences in their respective cities.

CLUBS FORUM

As part of a push towards increased student feedback, we've planned a Clubs Summit for mid-January where club executives can come together and discuss ways the USC can better support clubs. A report will be compiled after this event for further planning purposes.

REINTRODUCE INVOLVEMENT COMPASS WITH CAMPUS PARTNERS

Early this year, we went through the Involvement Compass algorithm and reviewed the questions to make sure students were being connected with only the most relevant clubs and organizations. Additionally, more people have been added as administrators so that a new array of involvement opportunities are available to students.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS COLLECTIVE

Rather than a collective, we created the caucus framework. Caucuses, which can act as an avenue for special-interest groups on campus to have their voice heard by the USC, will operate like a think-tank - meeting to discuss issues relating to them and recommending policy or action by the council. We quickly realized this structure can work for more than just international students, and as of now three have been created - the First Year Students' Caucus, the International Students' Caucus and the Mature and Transfer Students' Caucus.

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EXECUTIVE SCHEDULES

This year, the executive are doing everything they can to make information accessible and understandable to students at large. Our schedules are no exception. A feature has been added to the website for anyone to request the schedules of executive members, facilitated through the Communications Officer.

COLLABORATIVE VISION STATEMENTS

Thus far, each executive member has completed their first-term collaborative vision statement. These short documents outline the direction, goals and major priorities of each portfolio (internal, external, finance & governance, student events and communications) as agreed upon by the president and executive member. These documents will be added to the website in early 2016, and a second collaborative statement will be completed later in second term.

WEEKLY RESIDENCE VISITS

Staying connected with the first-year student experience is sometimes a challenge for executive council members as they enter their fourth, fifth and sometimes sixth year at Western. To remain cognisant of first-year interests and experiences, different executive members have been having meals in residences each week. The goal for next term is to better record these meals so we can make sure we're visiting as many different residences as possible.

ONLINE CONSTITUENT SURVEYS

This platform point initially discussed surveys for specific constituencies, but we've since learned the USC lacks the ability to target certain faculty email lists. However, we remained committed to increasing the number of feedback initiatives and have been able to complete an unprecedented number of surveys, focus groups and feedback reports this term. Additionally, we've laid the groundwork for a student-wide survey to take place every year asking broad questions about the educational experience and quality of life for students with the goal of tracking trends and progress.

EXTERNAL PORTFOLIO COORDINATOR ENHANCEMENT

Because much of the work in the external portfolio involved off campus work, in past years some student coordinators lacked clear direction in their roles. This year, we've developed such positions to include research projects where students could work on finding new ways to address issues or educate others on municipal, provincial and federal topics. An External Advocacy Taskforce was also created to mobilize this research and engage as many students as possible.

EXECUTIVE COMPOSITION CHANGES

To remedy inconsistencies in the executive portfolio, the USC altered the executive member composition to create portfolios which better reflected the nature and quality of work happening within the organization. These changes will be implemented for the 2016 election cycle.

USC BY-LAW REFORMS

Thus far, the USC has reformed and passed two by-laws. The first being By-Law 3 – which detailed the USC’s relationship with external bodies like OUSA and CASA – has now been more appropriately relegated to policies on external relationships. The second being By-Law 2, with elections and candidacy rules, being changed for clarity, accessibility and enforceability. A draft of the new By-Law 1 has also been prepared and will be presented to council in January.

A NEW WELLNESS CENTRE

The USC has successfully partnered with the university to build a Wellness Center in the University Community Centre. The centre will be an educational space that seeks to centralize health services on campus so students can get to where they need to go quicker. This space will be built by the USC but staffed by the university, tentatively opening in February.

ADDRESSING SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

The USC successfully advocated for a sexual violence prevention and education coordinator position within the university, which Western is now in the process of hiring for. This position will be based in the new Wellness Centre. Additionally, the USC co-hosted Western’s first sexual violence forum to explore new ways to address institutional responses to sexual violence.

IMPROVING THE ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ALLIANCE DELEGATE POSITIONS

This year, the USC opened OUSA delegate positions to all student to better engage students with our provincial advocacy efforts. These roles were also changed to solicit a greater amount of student feedback on policy decisions moving forward.

STUDENT SERVICES COMMITTEE PASSING FOUR NEW FEE ALLOCATIONS

The USC led the student services committee to fund four new initiatives: increased support for the alternative spring break program, the addition of a single session psychologist to the Student Development Centre, a social worker for Student Health Services and an elders-in-residence program for Indigenous Services.