

The USC Strategic Plan

FROM GAUNTLET TO STAIRWAY

DRAFT DOCUMENT

A Strategic Guide to the future of the University Students' Council

March 7, 2002

Covering Letter:

It's the nature of the beast.

The common excuse as to why a student council lacks long term vision. In my opinion, however, this is merely a generic excuse for a generic organization.

There is a reason, however, that the University Students Council at the University of Western Ontario, stands head and shoulders above all similar organizations. It is our ability to look at the box, and act outside of it. This is how the USC Strategic Plan has come to fruition.

It is my great pleasure to introduce this document, which began as a mere campaign idea, and has now flourished into a living, breathing vision for the USC for years to come. This document should be seen as two things: 1) a long term strategy for a organization which is often pressured to act in the short term vision. 2) a statement that we, the University Students' Council of 2001-2002, will not allow the brevity of our terms to create a near sighted vision for an organization in need of long term planning.

I would like to sincerely thank the Strategic Planning Committee for all their hard work in preparing this. I would also like to thank the 2001-2002 University Students' Council for their support of this idea and its vision. Finally, I would like to recognize all those who contributed ideas to this document and to the students of the University of Western Ontario who elected us to this council implement these plans, as we had promised.

Finally, I would like to ask future councils to recognize the value of this document and its ideals. Now is your opportunity to apply your ideas, your vision, and your minds to furthering the goals of this plan. This document is not step by step instructions to a successful council, rather, it is a plan that will need to be built upon by our successors through the addition of their vision.

Best of luck in the future. May you always remember why this organization exists

Sincerely,

Michael Lawless

2001-2002, University Students' Council President

**PART I
STUDENTS:**

1. One of the primary goals of this organization must be to provide involvement opportunities to as many students as possible. Following this, the University Students' Council will:

- a) provide ample opportunity for student employment wherever possible through our various operations, programs, events, and services.
- b) find a place for all willing and able students to get involved in the Western community. This will include opportunities within the council itself, and opportunities within the London community.
- c) take part in various activities for prospective students to inform them of the University Students' Council and the opportunities we provide upon their attendance at UWO.

2. The University of Western Ontario is truly a community within a larger community. As such, we should constantly be working towards creating a community atmosphere at Western. As the University Students' Council, we will:

- a) work towards creating a better sense of community within the University Community Center. This can be achieved by promoting the use of the Atrium as a center for debates, lectures, artwork, and musical performance.
- b) ensure that the Atrium always remains a true 'student' center and that we exercise great caution when allowing a corporate presence in the building.
- c) work towards furthering the sense of community outside the University Community Center into residences, faculties, and affiliates, with the help of various constituent councils.
- d) continue to work with Administration, and the City of London to ensure that our campus and its surrounding areas are as safe as possible. We must continue to pressure these two bodies to provide adequate funding for such projects and to take a progressive role in ensuring that our students are as comfortable as possible in their surroundings.

3. The University Students' Council will offer programming, services, and operations which recognize the diversity of the student population at the University of Western Ontario. We will:

- a) provide a wide range of events, clubs, and programs which welcome the diversity of our university community.
- b) recognize the wide age range of our students through our programs, events, and operations. As the age of our students gets progressively younger, our programming must reflect this. In addition, we must continue to provide programs for the mature student population of our community through our Lifelong Learning office.

c) provide a venue for students to raise concerns related to the students of UWO through the office of the Vice President, Campus Issues.

d) continue to work with the university in ensuring that the university is physically accessible to all individuals. In addition, it is important that initiatives relating to physical accessibility are not wholly funded by students through the USC Accessibility Levy. The University has an obligation to provide funding for these projects and should be lobbied to do so.

e) ensure that the USC employs a fair and equitable employment procedure for all applicants.

4. The University Students' Council will work as student advocates to all levels of government on various relevant issues as directed by our constituents. We will:

a) work alongside our provincial lobbying organization, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, to lobby the provincial government on issues of post-secondary education. The USC must continue to push for higher levels of funding to post-secondary education as we continue to strive towards making our universities accessible to all individuals, regardless of financial status.

b) work alongside our federal lobbying organization, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, to lobby the federal government on issues of post-secondary education.

c) maintain close ties with the City of London, through the office of the mayor, and through City Council so as to ensure that we continue to build a positive image of the students of UWO in the London and neighbouring communities.

d) build strategic alliances with alumni, administration, and other groups to strengthen our lobbying efforts within the various levels of government.

e) continue to work with the University and the government to ensure that the work-study programs is being utilized to its fullest potential, while adhering to the vision of the program as set by the government.

f) continue to promote the commitment of the University that 'no qualified student will be unable to attend Western or will be required to withdraw from any academic program at Western for financial reasons.' In addition, we must work with the University to ensure that they are effectively promoting this commitment to incoming students.

5. The USC will work as student advocates to the administration of The University of Western Ontario regarding relevant issues as directed by our constituents. We will:

a) work towards increasing student representation on the UWO Board of Governors so as to maximize the voice of the main stakeholders in the University, the students.

b) provide assistance to students regarding concerns of financial aid at the University. We will also work to promote available awards, scholarships, and bursaries. This will include the distribution of the USC Alumni Scholarship alongside the UWO Alumni Association.

c) educate students on information which affects them relating to students rights, the Code of Conduct, and other University policies. While we do not endorse these policies, we share in the responsibility to inform students of them, if and when they are adopted.

d) work alongside our student colleagues in the Senate Caucus on Governance, and on the Board of Governors to continue to work for student interests on the two main governing bodies of the University, the Senate and the Board of Governors.

e) build strategic alliances with various groups to strengthen our lobbying efforts within the University administration.

f) encourage fiscal transparency of the University ancillary units through the Student Services Committee.

g) consistently review the relevance of all student ancillary fees through the Student Services Committee. The SSC must maintain a large role in the Student Services Committee through the nomination of the SSC President to the role of Chair of the SSC.

6. The University Students Council must continue to be a fiscally responsible, and relevant organization to the students of this university. As a result we must constantly be reviewing our priorities, in terms of our services and operations. We will:

a) work towards a long term goal of reducing student fees over which the USC has control.

b) create a method of review to ensure that our services are relevant to the student body as a whole.

c) create any new services, as need arises and as directed by the student body of The University of Western Ontario.

7. The University Student' Council programs countless events throughout the year. In programming these events, there are several responsibilities that accompany the planning. In our future event planning we will:

a) ensure that the events that are programmed are relevant to the student body at UWO, recognizing the diversity of our student population relating to culture, age, and interests.

b) ensure Board or Council (where appropriate) approval of events of significant risk both in terms of finance and reputation.

8. The largest, and most comprehensive program of the University Students' Council is Orientation Week. This program has been incredibly successful in the past, and must continue to progress as an excellent tool of transition to University for all incoming students. The program has its challenges, however. As a result we will:

a) examine the costs of the program to both first year students, and Orientation sophs, and minimize these costs wherever possible, so as to ensure that it is as inclusive a program as possible.

b) increase the appeal of the program to all students. It is imperative that our programming reaches all students, including off-campus and international students.

c) promote a spirit of year-long orientation where our Orientation leaders maintain their commitment to the vision of Orientation throughout the year in assisting students in their transition to University life.

d) constantly review methods of Orientation leader selection so as to ensure we are selecting the best possible candidates, year after year.

e) work towards stabilizing Orientation Week as a permanent fixture in the calendar of the University.

PART II: COUNCIL

1. The governance structure of the University Students' Council must continuously be in a state of flux. We must be willing to adapt to the changing environment around us. We must also be willing to constantly improve our council so as to ensure it is as effective as possible. We will:

a) review the role of a councilor. It is imperative that the role of a councilor involves more than simply attending council meetings every second week. This process of expansion should include such things as office hours, class room presentations, faculty/residence/affiliate forums, etc.

b) formalize the training process of councilors and commissioners. It is important that all of our councilors be given training in the details of the USC, its operations, services, and its history. As representatives of the organization, councilors and commissioners should have a distinct knowledge of the USC.

c) ensure that council representation is reflective of the student body. We must review, on an annual basis, the number of councilors and whether that is reflective of the student population of the various constituencies.

d) examine the possibility of creating a non-voting position on council for a member of the University Students' Council Alumni Chapter.

e) continue to review the effectiveness of the governance structure as it exists in its present state.

2. The University Students' Council must act as a resource and guide for councils around the campus and around the country. We employ numerous staff to assist us in our endeavours and thus have the resources to assist other councils with their needs. We will:

a) provide assistance to Professional faculties, recognizing the differences in the programs, and in the needs of the students in the programs. In addition, we must continue to look at ways to better represent the students in these programs.

b) provide various venues for other councils to promote their message through our website, the USC Front, USC Notes, and other forms of USC media.

c) promote our resources to faculty, affiliate, and residence councils, so as to ensure that all councils are aware of where we can assist them.

d) continue to positively represent ourselves outside of The University of Western Ontario as leaders amongst student unions around the country. We can provide valuable assistance to other councils, and gain valuable assistance from other councils by maintaining positive relations with other post-secondary institutions.

e) provide a link between councils and University Administration to assist councils in dealing with various issues when requested.

3. The largest challenge facing our organization is in Communications. In order to better our ability to represent our constituents, we must communicate our resources, our services, our successes, our failures, and our mission. As the USC we will:

a) document our organization, its successes, its challenges, its services, and its operations, on an annual basis. We must do this by creating a University Students' Council Annual Report, to be available for our constituents' viewing.

b) effectively utilize our existing media outlets to their fullest potential.

c) increase the communication of various issues and initiatives of the University Students' Council to our students, and to our surrounding community.

d) review the relevance of our student media as a student voice.

e) enhance the effectiveness, and ensure the long term success of the USC Front, on the main floor of the University Students' Council atrium.

f) continuously look for new, and innovative ways to project our council to the community. The interactive CD ROM is exactly one initiative which allows us to employ modern technology to convey our message to our constituents.

PART III THE STAFF:

Progressive improvement of the capacity to achieve the USC mission in a professional and efficient way has got to be the main focus of all USC staff. While this posits some significant responsibility on the staff it also obligates the USC to try and maintain the quality of life of all of its employees. We will in the short term (six months – two years):

a) Continue to enhance the employee incentive program as a keystone to leveraging employee performance and loyalty using non-fiscal recognition in addition to the present fiscal system.

b) Renew the employee assistance program and work to make it available for part time staff if fiscally achievable.

c) Ensure continued dialogue with the collective bargaining unit using the Labour Management Relations Committee and the Health and Safety Committee.

d) Institute a new performance measurement system that is comprehensive, year long and geared to improve feedback to the employee and employer alike.

e) Rationalize and codify employment management policies that fall outside of the scope of collective bargaining into a manual that will serve as an adjunct to the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

The USC operates in a collective bargaining environment with CUPE local 2820, with the continued cooperation of both the management and local 2820 the USC will in the short and medium term (two to five years):

a) Continue to strive to resolve grievances in a timely manner at the lowest level possible.

b) Work toward a collective bargaining process that is based on open dialogue, mutual trust and passage of information.

c) Try and increase the sense of stability of all employees by establishing agreements of as long a term as possible prior to the expiry of terms in situ.

d) Ensure continuous improvement of working conditions to the extent that both unionized and non-unionized employees come to regard the USC as an employer of choice.

d) Attempt to maximize the employment opportunities for students within a mixed labour and non-labour environment, within the exigencies of the CBA.

PART IV: FINANCES AND BUSINESS

1. The first priority of the business units of the USC is to generate fiscal resources such that the governance mechanisms of the USC are not constrained from freedom of action on behalf of students. The second priority is to conduct their operations in such a manner as to offer reasonably priced, beneficial goods and services to the undergraduate students at The University of Western Ontario - while at the same time reducing the dependency of the USC on compulsory student fees. While both of these priorities are essential missions we have to always operate within the context of a sensitive political dynamic. This political sensitivity will on occasion restrict our business practices. We must be absolutely transparent about all of our practices. We must always defer to the sensitivities of students in acquiring sponsorship, partnerships or alliances. We must be cognisant of the fact that first and foremost the place in which we do business is a community centre not a mall. This defines the type of organisation we are and that we should continue to be. To operate within this more human context yet achieve our two priorities is the challenge. To achieve both of these priorities it is the responsibility of the Board of Directors to institute a long-term fiscal plan that achieves the following:

a) In the short term eliminate the deficit and reduce the annual cash flow shortage to zero. This absolutely essential precursor to financial stability can only be achieved if student governance has the self-discipline to allow cost of inflation increases to student fees in the short term.

b) Upon elimination of the deficit and the cash flow problem the fiscal flexibility should exist for the USC to accept a fee freeze for the mid term. This allows for political leadership in this regard within the University community while at the same time not so depleting fiscal resources that the USC cannot create a viable reserve out of the reserve fee that the students already had the foresight to set aside for this purpose. This freeze period should

last until a reasonable reserve has been built up (\$.9m to \$1.2m depending on USC sales volume). Based on current reserve fee levels this should take approx 4 years. This would be an appropriate time for the USC governance to renew the mandate for its services with the student body by having students prioritise the value of services offered.

c) Upon creation of a reserve, the financial health of the USC will have been secured to the point where the governance of the student body can take advantage of mortgage fees being retired to actually begin the fee reduction process. Dependant on the economic factors in place 7-8 years from now an ambitious model might be to try and reduce the fees on a 10% per annum basis over the next six years. This reduction level would be affected by the student valuation of services mentioned in the previous sub-para and is not inclusive of service growth or new services (i.e. a new dental plan, extension to the bus pass, USC sponsored financial aid etc.). Note that this fiscal reduction will only be possible in those fees which are controlled by the USC and which are not straight fees for services (health plan, bus pass etc).

2. Subordinate to the long-term plan the management of the USC consisting of the officers and directors at all levels must focus on cost reduction in service outlets and maximizing cash surplus in retail units by efficiencies and initiative. We will in the short term:

a) Reduce overhead costs in a responsible way.

b) Continue to incrementally reduce the time period of the cash flow shortage each summer by minimising capital and operating expenses in the June to mid-September timeframe.

c) Secure long term cash flow by maximizing space usage in the retail and rental subsets.

d) Eliminate the deficit within three years.

3. Over the mid-term the business management, operating under the authority of council and the board of directors, will:

a) Build a reserve representing a minimum of 5% of sales. The minimum targeted allocation to the reserve on a yearly basis to be no less than the amount generated by the reserve fee.

b) Stabilize to the maximum extent possible the annual capitalization of the USC at a sustainable rate such that year over year net capitalization is positive.

c) Take into account the factor that the USC is not the legal titleholder of the land on which the building is built. Therefore long-term survivability of an UCC-centric USC has a potentially critical vulnerability. While long standing legal agreements with the Board of Governors has mitigated most of this risk it is incumbent upon the USC to diversify as much as possible its revenue generation in the mid to long terms to further mitigate against a deterioration of relations. This vulnerability reinforces the need for a large sustainable reserve.

4. Over the medium and long terms the management must create new disbursement mechanisms designed to protect student finances and increase the potential range of services that those finances can be applied to. The USC must develop its own charitable

and/or trust and/or foundation arms, equally subordinate to student governance, but better configured than the present corporation to deliver some of the altruistic goals of the USC.

5. In attempting to achieve the aims of the long term financial plan outlined above each of the business units have to achieve specific goals within each of the three time frames. To this end each of our present units will:

a) Continue to strive for financial independence from student fees while respecting the fiscal strains already on students and avoiding the "airport mentality".

b) Institute customer feedback mechanisms to ensure relevance to the student body of goods and services offered.

c) Operate with absolute transparency and integrity.

6. With the above documentation as guidance annually updated execution matrices that establish rolling time frames with individual subunit objectives shall be developed in the short term. These matrices will become appendices to this plan and be approved on an annual basis by the General Manager and the Comptroller with the subunit manager.

ANNEX ONE: CREDITS

The USC Strategic Planning Task Force

The USC Strategic Planning Task Force met a number of times throughout the year in creating this document. Our discussions revolved around different methods of garnering feedback from the students of The University of Western Ontario, how to best document this feedback, and how to create a document that would be an effective picture of the future of this organization. The committee was comprised of the following individuals:

Mike Lawless, USC President (Chair)
Rob Irvine, USC VP Finance
Mark Sellars, USC General Manager
Sabrina Anzini, Council Representative
Arzie Chant, Student At Large

Contributors

The University Students' Council would like to thank the following individuals for various contributions to the plans. As the plan looks to the future and how to deal with issues of concern from students, the committee attempted to take these ideas and formulated more big-picture conclusions from them. We would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions and all others who added words of wisdom to this project.

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The 2001-2002 University Students' Council

This project could not have happened without the support of the 2001-2002 University Students' Council. As such, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the individuals who have been a part of the 2001-2002 University Students' Council. These individuals deserve as much credit as anyone for being a part of this document, and for being a part of a largely successful year on the USC.

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