



University Students' Council

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

Fax: (519) 661 - 2094

Dear Dr. Hrymack, Mrs. Logan and Mr. Chelladurai,

On behalf of the University Students' Council at Western University and the 35,000 undergraduate and professional students we represent, I write to share our thoughts on the priorities for next year's university budget.

In the 2020-2021 budget, you continued working towards Western's mission to *Achieve Excellence on the World Stage* by prioritizing the creation of an Office of Indigenous Initiatives, developing the Long-Range Space Plan, increasing funding to support students in financial need, and implementing University-Wide Data Strategy Initiatives. We welcomed these actions and firmly believe the University's work in these areas should continue.

At the same time, we urge you to address equally important challenges in the 2021-2022 budget: the need for more equity, diversity and inclusion, development of robust work-integrated learning opportunities, increased distribution of financial aid on campus and the prioritization of sustainable initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unforeseeable complications for many of our students, our institution, and our society as whole. Looking ahead, as the university rebuilds, it is critical that we do so in a way which prioritizes the future success of our institution and particularly, our students.

In light of these challenges, we urge you to consider Western's fundamental belief in creating, disseminating, and applying knowledge for the benefit of society. In our view, a comprehensive strategy to strengthen Western's competitiveness and recover from the impacts of the pandemic includes the prioritization of the aforementioned themes.

The USC is committed to the success and wellbeing of the undergraduate and professional population, the creation of new opportunities for our students, and the dismantlement of barriers preventing the leaders of tomorrow from reaching their full



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potential. We are grateful for your leadership, and to have had the opportunity to discuss these ideas with you in the context of the 2021-2022 university budget at our consultation on November 18th.

We hope that this document and the enclosed recommendations can assist you and your teams in crafting funding priorities for the 2021-2022 fiscal year and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barroso". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light grey rectangular background.

Victoria Barroso
Vice-President University Affairs

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Reesor". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light grey rectangular background.

Matt Reesor
USC President



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Priority #1: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Create and recruit a senior administrator for equity and inclusion

Many Canadian universities have created a senior administrator role for equity and inclusion. This includes the AVP Human Rights, Equity, and Inclusion at the University of Waterloo; the AVP Equity and Inclusion at McMaster; the Associate Provost (Equity & Academic Policies) at McGill; the AVP Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at Laurier; and the VP Equity and Community Inclusion at Ryerson.

The USC supports The President's Anti-Racism Working Group's proposal to create an Associate Vice President, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) role at Western. This role would help address key needs for creating a safe, inclusive campus: a need for more robust data on diversity and instances of racism on Western's campus,¹ a need for clarification of EDI best practices, and a need for formalized EDI accountability.² As an advocacy office created to support students, this office would provide an important point of centralization for discrimination reporting on campus and would empower more students to come forward about discrimination they have experienced at Western.

Recommendation: The University should allocate funds to the creation of and recruitment for the Associate Vice President Equity, Diversity and Inclusion role.

Implement an accessible racism reporting tool

At Western, the process for reporting misconduct is not centralized; rather, specific types of complaints are independently managed by different stakeholders. Inclusion- and diversity-related claims must be filed through Equity And Human Rights Services, claims of sexual

¹ "If we do not know, quantitatively, what representation looks like at Western, then we will not know the scale of the problem Western faces as an institution. For example, the fact that we are unable to tell what the percentages of marginalized groups are at our institution is a pressing problem that needs to be addressed for real progress to be made." (15)

<https://president.uwo.ca/pdf/arwg-final-report-to-president-shepard-fnl.pdf>

² "Western promotes diversity and inclusion but does not act upon it; promotes the idea of EDI, but does not do the structural work to implement EDI" (17)

<https://president.uwo.ca/pdf/arwg-final-report-to-president-shepard-fnl.pdf>



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violence must be logged using the Sexual Violence Reporting Form, and all other types of misconduct must be reported as a Code of Conduct violation through Student Experience. Currently, the onus is on students to determine which reporting tool best fits their individual case.

This system relies on students being aware of all reporting tools with a level of understanding that allows them to determine which tool best fits their individual claim. However, this is often not the case. Many students are unaware of the different reporting mechanisms available to them or, if they are aware, are uncertain as to which method of reporting is most appropriate for their specific needs.³ This can lead to reporting a case through the wrong tool. This is an issue because it takes courage to report misconduct like racial discrimination or sexual assault, and any obstacle (needing to be transferred to another service, dealing with a person who is not trained to support your specific claim, etc.) can lead to a loss of confidence in and abandonment of the reporting process.⁴

With regards to racism reporting specifically, many Canadian students report losing confidence in university reporting processes and cite this lack of confidence as a reason for pursuing less-traditional reporting methods. Kelly Weiling Zou, a Queen's University student, references frustration with her university's reporting process as her motivation to create @stolenbysmith, an Instagram account for students to anonymously report equity-related misconduct.⁵ The creation of similar accounts at Western - including @uwominoritystory, @blackatwestern, and @iveyatthemargins - demonstrates that a similar problem exists at Western. While Equity And Human Rights Services has noted a lack of students reporting incidences of racial discrimination, these student-run accounts have experienced an influx of discrimination claims: since July 2020, @uwominoritystory has had 91 submissions, @iveyatthemargins has had 323 submissions, and @blackatwestern has had 21 submissions. This clearly demonstrates that there is a misalignment between students who are looking to report instances of discrimination and the tools that The University offers for this purpose.

³ "ARWG heard there is a lack of clarity about university policies and complaint processes with regard to racism. Students, faculty and staff say they don't know where to turn for assistance when they experience or witness acts of racism." (15) <https://president.uwo.ca/pdf/arwg-final-report-to-president-shepard-fnl.pdf>

⁴ "Some recalled attempts to seek help through official channels as futile—disappointed by the outcome, and in some instances suffering additional negative ripple effects after the initial incident. The psychological harm of such incidents can be significant." (15) <https://president.uwo.ca/pdf/arwg-final-report-to-president-shepard-fnl.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-universities-racism-instagram-1.5716603>



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Recommendation: The University should prioritize the creation of a racism-specific reporting tool. This tool should have both a formal and informal reporting option: formal for those looking to initiate a formal investigation, and informal for those who simply want to make The University aware of discrimination that has transpired without triggering an investigation.

Recommendation: The University should establish a centralized reporting process through the office of the Associate Vice President Equity Diversity and Inclusion. All students looking to report discrimination or misconduct would report through one form, at which point they will be triaged to the appropriate reporting tool for their individual case.

Mandate anti-racism training for faculty and staff

From the President's Anti-Racism Working Group Final Report,⁶ it is clear that racism is a widespread problem on this campus. Furthermore, whether it be professors using the N-word in the classroom,⁷ the work of Phillip Rushton, or the numerous instances of discrimination in the classroom cited by students on @uwominoritystory, @blackatwestern, and @iveyatthemargins, it is apparent that there is a long-standing history of discrimination at a faculty level at Western.

We believe that it is essential that Western provide anti-racism training for faculty and staff in order to begin to address the root of this problem. Anti-racism training initiatives have begun to be implemented by other Ontario Universities: The University of Waterloo implemented anti-racism training sessions for leaders in June 2020,⁸ and the University of Toronto hosted a two-day conference to discuss anti-black racism in higher education in October 2020.⁹

Recommendation: The University should allocate funds in order to create an anti-racism training for faculty members. This training should be made mandatory in all new faculty contracts negotiated by The University and should be added as a clause when current faculty contracts are up for re-negotiation. This training should be available at three times per year --

⁶ "For the past four months, we have heard from hundreds of community members about the insidious, often violent, nature of racism at Western and its devastating impact on their mental and physical health, and on their sense of well-being and belonging." (4)

⁷ <https://president.uwo.ca/pdf/arwg-final-report-to-president-shepard-fnl.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/western-prof-uses-n-word-1.5338315>

⁹ <https://uwaterloo.ca/president/blog/post/we-stand-together-against-racism>

⁹ <https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/nationaldialogues/>



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prior to the Fall, Winter, and Summer semesters -- so as to be integrated into the onboarding process for new professors.

Recommendation: Anti-racism training should be integrated into the tenure track, with the expectation that faculty must demonstrate participation in anti-racism training in order to receive tenure.



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Priority #2: Affordability

In the USC's 2019-2020 General Student Survey, 48% of students indicated university costs and affordability as their top advocacy priority¹⁰. When surveying COVID-19 impacts on students heading into this academic year, students indicated cost of education as their second biggest concern after quality of online education. Through student feedback, the USC has identified the significant financial barriers faced by the undergraduate population that have only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

While Western's student population is affluent overall, there are still students graduating with large amounts of debt. The loss of personal and familial income as a result of the pandemic and its economic impact have left students in a vulnerable position where it is difficult to project whether or not they will be able to complete their degree.

According to Western University's 2018-2019 exit survey, the mean debt, excluding those who are fortunate enough to come from a family who can pay for their education in full, was \$42,031¹¹. Notably in that same survey, 96 students indicated that they would graduate with over \$100,000 in debt - more than some people will make in their lifetime.

When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visited our campus in 2017, he called Western "the Harvard of Canada"¹². While there are many differences in the post-secondary landscape between Canada and the United States, it is important to note Harvard's commitment to accessible education. This is reflected in the fact that 55% of Harvard students receive needs-based scholarships and 1 in 5 pays nothing to attend¹³. Attaining this baseline of financial assistance can and should be a long-term goal for Western if it aims to be a leading institution in Canada and internationally. In the short term, adopting the outlook that the educational quality and value of attending Western University is too beneficial for students to miss out as a result of financial barriers will show support for students - especially during COVID-19 and what will be remembered as some of the most unprecedented years to ever face the post-secondary sector.

¹⁰ General Student Survey, University Students' Council (2019-2020)

¹¹ https://www.ipb.uwo.ca/exit_survey/

¹² <https://www.westerngazette>

¹³ <https://college.harvard.edu/financial-aid>



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Roughly twelve years ago, Western University provided students the 'Western Guarantee' that no qualified student would be unable to attend Western and no Western student would be required to withdraw from an academic program for lack of access to adequate financial resources. Similar to the 'Student Access Guarantee' partnership program with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities¹⁴, we hope to see Western University reestablish the 'Western Guarantee' in a way that more actively allocates funds to low-income students. Additionally, this institutional program should support indirect costs associated with pursuing post-secondary education which are not included in the partnership program with the provincial government.

Recommendation: Western University should reinstate the 'Western Access Guarantee' that no qualified student would be unable to attend Western and no Western student would be required to withdraw from an academic program for lack of access to adequate financial resources

Recommendation: The Provost and Vice-Provost, Academic Programs in collaboration with the University Students' Council should develop and put forward a Policy on Student Financial Support to the Senate Committee of Academic Policy and Awards outlining the allocation of funds to support Western's commitment to accessible education.

¹⁴ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-apply-osap#section-2>



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Priority #3: Sustainability

In its 2012 sustainability plan, Western University set out to become a zero waste campus by 2022, which is now less than two years away. However, Western reports that their current waste diversion rate is only 50%, meaning significant strides need to be made to achieve a zero waste campus by 2022¹⁵. By instituting a paper towel bin program, Western can reduce its waste output by approximately 17%¹⁶. This development is a step Western surely needs to achieve long term strategy to be a sustainable campus.

Paper towels are single use compostable materials prevalent across all campuses. Most paper towels are either placed in garbage bins and wasted, or are placed in recycling bins that have cross contamination, meaning they also end up being waste. Paper towels were a primary contributor to waste at the University of Toronto, accounting for 10% of waste in their 2019 waste audit¹⁷. In addition, paper towels accounted for 13.6% of McMasters total waste in 2019. Eliminating paper towel waste will be a necessary step to achieve a net zero waste school. The University of Alberta has realized this fact, implementing a paper towel bin pilot project. They allocated bins specific for paper towel collection in restrooms to divert paper towel waste. The program yielded significant results. On one floor with 117 employees, a 65-gallon bin was filled each week with paper towels. As this program has been undertaken by other universities, Western can follow suit, showcasing its commitment to a sustainable campus.

The city of London, along with other cities and international corporations have begun making commitments to sustainability. The city of London has committed to an action plan to reach a waste diversion rate of 60% by 2035¹⁸. In addition, international corporations, such as Apple are making commitments to become net-zero waste and carbon neutral within the next 10-20 years¹⁹. The climate crisis is ongoing and it is important that Western plays a role in a sustainable future.

¹⁵ https://sustainability.uwo.ca/Campus/waste_reduction/waste_audits.html

¹⁶ https://sustainability.uwo.ca/wise/2018_winners.html

¹⁷

<https://www.fs.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/P1015-UofT-Fall-2019-Waste-Audit-Jan-2020-Draft1.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://getinvolved.london.ca/12714/widgets/50491/documents/28876/download>

¹⁹

<https://www.apple.com/ca/newsroom/2020/07/apple-commits-to-be-100-percent-carbon-neutral-for-its-supply-chain-and-products-by-2030/>



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The concerns leading to the commitment to sustainability of other universities and corporations are reflected among students. Student clubs such as Student Energy and the USC's Envirowestern have become increasingly vocal about climate action and sustainability on campus. The Climate Crisis Coalition was formed by students last year to organize all student clubs addressing climate change under a unified voice. A petition to support their mission was circulated last year and signed by over 400 students, including 70 representatives from different student clubs and organizations at Western. Implementing a paper towel bin program would be a step towards a more sustainable campus, a campus students are excited about.

In 2018, Annabelle Lauren won Western's Ideas for Sustainability and the Environment (WISE) Competition, with the idea to implement paper towel only bins in washrooms²⁰. Lauren created a Western specific plan. The solution proposed Western includes different coloured paper towel only bins in campus washrooms, allowing the compostable material to be diverted from landfills to organic material facilities, such as Orgaworld, here in London. Lauren highlighted the difference colour of the bins and bags could have on behaviour. Outlining that a different coloured bin, like orange, with clear bags would be ideal versus garbage with grey bin and black bags. Lauren's proposal seeks to divert waste from campus, aiding in their goal to reach a zero waste campus by 2022. The USC believes that Western recognized the quality of this solution in 2018, and should provide funding to act on it now.

Given trends in comparable institutions, companies, and student engagement towards sustainability, Western should provide funding to implement paper towel bins and a waste transportation plan within the UCC. The pilot program could be consistent with Annabelle Lauren's recommendation, or a more efficient method of waste diversion. It is the University Students' Council's opinion that paper towel bins and a proper disposal method is an important step for Western to take towards a more sustainable campus.

Recommendation: The USC believes Western should provide funds to implement a paper towel bin pilot project in all washrooms of the UCC.

Recommendation: The USC believes Western should provide funds to implement a transportation method to an organic material facility for the sustainable composting of these paper towels.

²⁰ https://sustainability.uwo.ca/wise/2018_winners.html



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Priority #4: Work-Integrated Learning

Experiential education refers broadly to the process of developing structural and functional learning experiences that can help individuals meet their knowledge or learning goals. Experiential learning and work integrated learning allow students to take what they've learned in the classroom and apply it in workplace settings in order to get "real world" experience.

Western University currently offers WIL programs in over 45 academic programs, with a focus of WIL on internships, co-ops, and practicums²¹. However, many of the available opportunities are concentrated at the graduate level and are especially limited for students in the FIMS, Music and Arts & Humanities faculties. The USC believes integrating work opportunities and career development into degree outcomes for all programs will not only increase the employability of Western graduates, but also address concerns surrounding affordability by allowing students to earn money throughout their degree.

WIL and experiential learning more broadly, are a stated priority for Western's current administration²². Additionally, Western has chosen to emphasize the weighting of this particular area in the third iteration of the provincial strategic mandate agreement (SMA3) set to influence institutional funding in the coming years. As a result, the USC supports the allocation of funds to improve both access and the process for students at this pivotal stage in the future of post-secondary education.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has had precarious impacts on the economy as a whole, notably creating an uncertain job market for new graduates. This makes the experience gained from WIL all the more important now so Western students are the best positioned graduates entering the workforce. Investing in the development of WIL opportunities in this budget cycle will show institutional support for students during this unprecedented time, bolster the local economy and contribute to the university's long-term strategic vision and future recruitment.

²¹ http://hirewesternu.ca/hire_western_talent/work_integrated_learning_wil/index.html

²²

<https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/lfp-longform-q-and-a-with-western-universitys-new-president-alan-shopard>



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It is crucial that Western either build on the foundation of already existing frameworks or develop a unique framework to describe quality WIL at the program level. This framework would not only be a valuable tool for providing snapshots of WIL programs at points in time, but also for establishing and developing processes that lead to quality, sustainable WIL programs. A WIL-specific quality framework could also be used to demonstrate that resources being directed toward WIL programming are being effectively utilized for meeting institutional, employer, and student goals – a key point when the new Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA 3) goes into place in 2021-2022.

Recommendation: Western University should develop a framework for Work-Integrated Learning at the program level that outlines specific outcomes to ensure students in all faculties have meaningful opportunities to engage in experiential learning.

Recommendation: Western University should fund initiatives to establish local, provincial and national networks to increase the creation of Work-Integrated Learning opportunities.

Recommendation: Western University should invest funds into the Work-Integrated Learning portfolio to reorganize it such that the opportunities are accessible, well-publicized and available in-program to students in all faculties.