



THE USC
CHARTER
2021

THE USC CHARTER

2021



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Through our research and consultations with Indigenous students on our campus, we know that land acknowledgements are not intended to be comfortable. They are meant to recognize the ongoing injustices committed against Indigenous peoples and the long-standing impact that they have on society. They also encourage us to think critically about our own personal roles in the injustices that have occurred and are occurring against Indigenous folks, on our campus and throughout our nation.

We recognize that Indigenous students have unique experiences on our campus, and that Western education has historically been used as a tool of oppression and erasure against Indigenous peoples. Our retelling of Canadian history often excludes Indigenous stories and perspectives, even going as far as to remove historical injustices and genocide.

As an organization created to empower and support our students throughout their educational experience, it is particularly important to acknowledge and recognize the power of education as a tool for healing and reconciliation. The USC always seeks to empower students on our campus to voice their perspectives on the issues that matter most to them, but we must recognize that there is still immense work to be done, at the USC and across Western's campus. We must remain active in our process of learning and unlearning to ensure that we take responsibility for educating ourselves on the history of the lands that we are situated upon and their impacts on those that lived upon them first.

With this, I wish to acknowledge that Western University and our Affiliate Colleges are located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum.

The three First Nations communities closest in proximity to this University are: Chippewa of the Thames First Nation (part of the Anishinaabe); Oneida Nation of the Thames (part of the Haudenosaunee); and, Munsee-Delaware Nation (part of the Leni-Lunaape).

I respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers. We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples endure in Canada, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research and community service.

THE USC CHARTER

2021



DEAR STUDENTS...AGAIN,

We are incredibly excited to present the University Students' Council Charter, a culmination of the most important organizational values, ideas, and aspirations of the past decade — brought forth by USC Presidents, executive teams, full-time staff, and most importantly, Western students.

In a standard cycle, duringprecedented times, the USC's strategic plan is written by the sitting President every four years. This year, at the beginning of our planning process, our Chief Operating Officer, Jeff Armour taught me about the sole purpose of strategic planning — to foster organizational change. However, as we began to brainstorm, we found ourselves struggling to find reasons to fundamentally change our mission, which has been and continues to remain, to enhance the educational experience and quality of life for all undergraduate students at Western, Brescia, Huron, and King's. Instead, we found ourselves wanting to change the way we understood, approached, and executed these concepts.

As our discussion furthered, we realized that the USC, our student leaders, and the broader Western community was living and breathing our current strategic plan — an effective and representative document published by 2016-17 President, Eddy Avila. Given these facts, it did not make sense to rewrite our strategic plan; rather, it provided us with an opportunity to reimagine the organization's strategic planning process as a whole.

So, before you is Dear Students (2017), whose mission, vision, and values continue to engrain themselves in our organizational activities, day over day. With Dear Students (2017) serving as the body text, the USC Charter will serve as the guiding document of the USC's new strategic planning process, and will be accompanied by three other sections:

THE USC CHARTER

2021



DEAR STUDENTS...AGAIN,

- 1 **USC Charter:** Sets forth the core mission, vision, and values of the organization
- 2 **USC Frameworks:** Identifies the lenses through which every member of the organization should examine the development and execution of their work
 - a. *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Framework (May 2021)*
 - b. *Sustainability Framework (May 2021)*
- 3 **Policy Paper Library:** Presents data-driven principles, concerns, and recommendations on USC advocacy files, including sexual and gender based violence, student financial aid, mental health, and more
- 4 **USC Roadmap:** One-year tactical plan, written by the executive of the day and passed through Summer Council, which outlines their goals for their year in office

Collectively, these documents informed by years of student feedback and leadership, will enable the USC to maintain continuity without impeding flexibility, which is essential for an organization whose leadership, issues, and priorities shift, year over year.

It is in years and planning processes such as these that the USC is challenged most. And it is these challenges that present an opportunity for us to truly understand why the USC exists: to create a campus community where every student feels supported and empowered to change the world

Sincerely,

Matt Reesor

University Students' Council President 2020-2021

THE USC CHARTER

2021



THE STORY OF THE USC

In order to understand our strategic planning process and the Charter before you, it is important to first understand what the University Students' Council is, where we came from, and what we stand for. Beginning as the University Students' Commision, in 1930, the USC was created to unite the two faculties at Western, Arts and Medicine. Now, the USC has grown into a \$30 million not-for-profit organization that represents over 30,000 students at Western, Brescia, Huron, and King's from all undergraduate and professional programs.

Beginning as a small group of students looking to connect the Hippocratic Council and the Students' Administrative Assembly (S.A.A), the USC initially struggled to find its feet. By 1947, following a title change to the University Students' Council, the USC began to find its identity. In 1965, the USC faced its defining challenge – a student-led protest against the sale of the Labatt Brewery – which facilitated the legitimization and incorporation of the USC, from a casual student organizing body to a fully functioning not-for-profit.

In the early 90s, the USC began to jump forward with leaps and bounds. As Council began to mature and the student voice grew stronger, the organization's growth brought forward conflict with Western's administration on topics such as Orientation Week, the Spoke, and the Wave. Internally, the USC negotiated an agreement to assume a large portion of the real estate in the UCC along with an occupancy agreement. These additional organizational responsibilities highlighted the need for a General Manager, who was brought on to provide stability for the corporation and institutional memory for student leaders, year over year.

In the 2000s, the USC embedded itself deeply into the Western community, backing major infrastructure projects including the development of the Student Recreation Centre and the renovation of the University Community Centre. Further, the USC built Mustang Lounge and renovated the Wave to produce familiar spaces that students know and love. In the same decade, the USC established a 4 year cycle for strategic planning and furthered its productivity as a non-profit.

THE USC CHARTER

2021



THE STORY OF THE USC

Heading into the 2010s, the USC's Council endorsed an "external board" of students, hired to oversee fiduciary responsibility and manage the corporation, through the Chief Operating Officer. This change allowed the Council and the Executive to focus their efforts on advocating on behalf of the student voice, which built our reputation as a student government in London and across Ontario. Further, the USC bolstered student development opportunities through the introduction of the Associate Vice-President program, which furthered our organizational capacity

This history shows where the USC came from and why it was initially founded:

- 1 To **unite** Western's student body, and
- 2 To create a **space** for students to **voice their concerns** for issues they believe in. While the USC has grown significantly since 1965, these core intentions still remain a priority for the USC, our student leaders, and our staff.

In this pursuit, the University Students' Council has evolved to become one of the largest not for profits in London, Ontario, made up of a remarkable collection of operations, resources and leadership opportunities. As we enter the 2020s, the USC is responsible for so many aspects of student life, including the Spoke and Wave, the clubs system, the peer programs network, and student advocacy to various levels of government. We remain steadfast in our commitment to improve students' academic and student experience, now and in the future.

VISION STATEMENT:

**Students have
the power to
change the world.**

MISSION STATEMENT:

**To enhance the
educational
experience and
quality of life for all
undergraduates at
Western University.**

THE USC CHARTER

2021



VALUES

We are **Democratic**

The USC is fundamentally a democratic institution. Students elect students to represent them on our campus and off of it. Students have the ultimate power in deciding what the USC does, and how we do it. It thrives and functions on students and student feedback in every manner possible. Our elected student leaders are all held accountable by our Council, a group of elected representatives from each constituency that are all proportionately represented on the USC. We will continue to engage as many students as possible through the democratic process and show the power of student voice on our campus.

We are **Inclusive**

Our constituents are all incredibly diverse individuals with different perspectives, experiences, wants, and needs. We work to ensure that all diverse voices are included, represented, and considered in every decision that the USC makes. We are committed to serving, supporting, and enhancing the experiences of all students regardless of their gender, race, sexuality, religion, ability, or age. We understand that our community does not always provide equal opportunity to all students, and thus, the USC will strive to remove barriers standing in the way of equal opportunity and representation. We will celebrate uniqueness and individuality and ensure that no one on our campus will be limited in opportunity or experience due to their differences.

We are **Student Led**

Students are at the forefront of the organization. Student leaders fill all of the organizations change-making roles including the Chief Executive Officer, the Executive Body, and the Board of Directors. Students are responsible for creating the vision and direction for the organization. Part-time student employees similarly act in direct support to the USC Executive Body in the advocacy, programming, services, initiatives, engagement, and collaboration of the organization. It is the vision of the students that guides this organization, and we will continue to ensure that student leaders are the primary voice leading the USC forward.

THE USC CHARTER

2021



VALUES

We are **Accountable** to our students

Elected student representatives and students-at-large are our guiding force and we remain accountable to them. Students have every avenue to critique, influence, and enforce decisions that help the USC fill its mandate and serve students to the best of our ability. Student leaders are elected to act in the best interest of their constituents and collectively, these elected representatives hold the USC Executive Council accountable. The USC will continue to increase transparency to our students-at-large and encourage collaboration with Constituency Councils to further engage students on what the USC is doing.

We operate with **Integrity**

The USC acts with integrity in every decision that is made by student leaders and employees of the USC. We are all united through the shared promise of acting in the best interest of our students. Everyone at the USC remains united in the common goal for the betterment of the student experience. We operate with fairness and honesty and ensure that every decision is decided by viewing them through an ethical, representative and fair lens. Integrity is essential for maintaining the trust of our constituents and serving them to the best of our ability.

THE USC CHARTER

2021



AREAS OF FOCUS

Student Support

Student support is at the core of the betterment of the student experience. We cannot serve our mission to enhance the quality of life of students if we do not first ensure that all students feel welcomed, accepted, represented, and supported at this institution.

The mental wellbeing and health of our students is instrumental in ensuring that our students are having the best student experience at Western. The USC will work to ensure that we provide enough avenues where students can practice holistic wellbeing, and advocating to ensure that student wellbeing is a priority of university life.

Our students need to feel safe and protected on their campus, and incidents of sexual violence continues to threaten this. The USC will put more resources into combating sexual violence on our campus through training and education, as well as work to improve the way we support survivors.

The USC will ensure that all levels of diverse student needs are being met so that each student can access equal opportunities at Western. We are committed to diversity and inclusion that combats racism and other social barriers that limit our students.

Students understand student needs best. Based on this principle, we will continue to support peer mentoring programs that give students the opportunity to learn, grow, and heal with students that can best understand their situation.

We will work collaboratively with the University Administration to improve the structures in place that provide challenges to student success and well-being.

The USC should remain receptive to student feedback to inform and dictate how students are supported at this University.

THE USC CHARTER

2021



AREAS OF FOCUS

Student Advocacy

First and foremost, the USC exists to represent students and advocate for students.

While the USC has the power to change things within our organization that affect our students, a lot of student-facing issues are out of our direct control and need to be addressed through advocacy initiatives. We are committed to advocating on and off of our campus, and to all levels of government, on behalf of our ever-changing student body.

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Students and student-elected representatives are the most suited individuals to speak on behalf of student needs. Therefore, we will strive to be actively involved in the decision-making process of any change that will affect students.

The USC will put an emphasis on improving the capacity for issue identification and research related to student concerns. This will allow us to become more effective and efficient in our long-term advocacy efforts.

We will continue to increase the capacity for students to be involved in every aspect of advocacy including but not limited to issue identification, research, influencing and maintaining relationships with decision makers.

We will increase our Council's understanding of advocacy to ensure that they are fulfilling their mandate to their students, and that they have the tools to properly represent them.

The USC will continue to ensure that advocacy remains a priority in every level of this organization by integrating an understanding of advocacy into all departments of the USC. We will increase staff support for advocacy so that it remains a priority for our student leaders and to the organization as a whole.

THE USC CHARTER

2021



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Student Development & Opportunity

During their time at Western, students develop through their experiences in the classroom. However, the USC believes that there should also be student opportunities to grow as leaders, thinkers, and creators outside of the classroom.

The value of experiential learning cannot be understated and the USC will continue to do our part to increase the number of work integrated learning opportunities that we have for students.

Every element of the USC should be empowering student leadership at the forefront of its organizational, management, and visionary roles. With the help of our full-time staff members, the USC will continue to shift the models of our various operations and functions to ensure that students can be involved in every level of the USC.

The USC will continue to increase the amount of student working and development hours, as well as the types of opportunities we offer, to reduce any barriers limiting student involvement. We will continue to maintain USC Alumni relationships and expand our mentorship program so students can learn from other students, as well as Western and USC graduates.

THE USC CHARTER

2021



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Student Engagement & Collaboration

Students know how they like to be engaged with better than anyone. That is why putting students at the forefront of the visioning, creation, and strategy of all USC branding, public relations, and communication is essential to the success of the organization and the engagement of our student body.

Our students deserve to understand what the USC does on their behalf and the number of opportunities available to them. We will continue to refine and shift our communications portfolio to ensure that priority is given to making sure that the student body understands the USC.

We will prioritize student feedback and focus on data collection to ensure that our priorities and vision shifts with the students we are serving. Similarly, we will create a strategy outlining the most effective method of collecting relevant and consistent student feedback.

We will continue to strive to maximize engagement with an understanding that students are the experts when it comes to their interests and wants.

The USC will continue to strive for a collective vision and brand for all services, programming, and operations of the USC. In order to achieve this, there needs to be an emphasis on cross-department communication and information sharing.

The USC will continue to ensure that all forms of communication are relevant and shift with the changing student body and technology.

We will provide increased support for all communication, public relations, marketing, and branding efforts, to ensure that student engagement remains a priority.

Student feedback and data should be incorporated into the USC Executive Council transition training to ensure that all student leadership understands the needs of their constituents and the importance of continued data collection.

THE USC CHARTER

2021



AREAS OF FOCUS

Student Life

One of the largest areas of the USC is programming and services to enhance the lives of Western students. An element of improving the student experience is ensuring that there are relevant services and programming that students can access.

We will continue to work towards creating diverse programming that offers all students a space to engage within the USC.

We will put students at the forefront of deciding what programming looks like by engaging with more students and offering more opportunities for them to choose from.

We will constantly review our service offerings and evaluate our findings to ensure that the best possible programming opportunities exist for students.

We will continue to work to create relevant programming and opportunities at an affordable price so that financial barriers do not limit a student's experience within the USC.

We will maintain a balance between entertainment based events as well as educational, cultural, and non-traditional events.

We will put an emphasis on funding and organizing programming and initiatives to support students through high-stress times and areas of vulnerability.