

VP External

“A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies.” - Martin Luther King, Jr.

External Affairs

The Quebec student movement is gearing up for a pretty big fight against tuition increases in Quebec, and this has meant many meetings to coordinate a large number of student unions' actions. Many student unions are already gearing up to what may culminate in a student strike in the winter.

As you may know, the main body through which SSMU interacts with the rest of the student movement as well as the government is the Quebec Student Roundtable. Many projects are currently in the works to put pressure on the Quebec government: these include a open letters to the editors of major newspapers, a joint newsletter to keep students updated about the latest actions and government announcements, and the development of a joint set of arguments detailing alternatives to tuition hikes.

I have also attended regular meetings with Montreal's other three major Anglophone student unions (PGSS and the two campus-wide student unions at Concordia). The discussions around the table seem to be favourable to concrete collaborations in the upcoming year, whether this means sharing information and material or even organizing joint contingents to the major student demonstrations in the upcoming year.

Speaking of which, two of Quebec's province-wide student organizations, FECQ and FEUQ, have begun to organize a major student action on November 10th. It's unclear to what extent the more active of the province-wide student organizations (ASSÉ) will endorse the demonstration. Since the demonstration will be taking place in Montreal, I believe it will be highly relevant for McGill students to know about the day of action and hopefully participate. There will be a General Assembly motion submitted to this effect.

In other news, I have talked with representatives of some CEGEP student unions in Montreal (specifically from Dawson and Vanier Colleges). They were interested in knowing what we're doing to contribute to one of the biggest fights the student movement will fight in a decade. This is a very good sign as often these student unions can be harder to get in touch with. They seemed interested in meeting with student unions at McGill and Concordia – I hope this will develop into a more long-term collaboration that will outlast this (busy) year!

One of my campaign promises was to work towards keeping fees low for out-of-province and international students. Since much less groundwork has been laid in terms of research on the latter category of students, SSMU hired Salman Hafeez to do research on the living, working, and studying conditions of international students in Quebec. At the time of writing, this research was still a work in progress, but Salman should submit his final report by Monday, September 19th. My major priority in term of external affairs this year will be to produce research, develop policies, and be an advocate for out-of-province and international students both towards the Quebec government, which still has not announced how much fees may go up for these categories of students, and towards the student movement, which can overlook these students in its lobbying and mobilization efforts.

Mobilization and campus affairs

Tuition increases

SSMU's major go-to source for information on tuition increases is tuitiontruth.ca. Over the summer, I created material to promote the website and raise awareness about tuition increases and got it printed. As well, I updated the website to include more up-to-date information about the tuition increases that were announced by the Quebec government.

Most recently, I helped develop a workshop for students on post-secondary education and tuition hikes. Along with Arts Rep Micha Stettin, the workshop was delivered to participants in QPIRG-McGill's annual Rad Frosh. The workshop got a lot of interest, and I hope to adapt it to many different audiences at McGill.

Finally, thanks to the work of Niko Block, SSMU's Political Campaigns Coordinator, tables are booked in the SSMU building and elsewhere on campus to raise awareness about tuition hikes and how students may get involved. The stage is set, the lights are on... but there are more actors in this play than anyone had expected since MUNACA is now on strike! This has meant that a lot of the energy I've been able to put into SSMU's campaigns has gone into working on labour issues at McGill.

MUNACA strike

As you know, McGill's permanent non-academic staff union is currently on strike. In keeping with SSMU's policy to support campus unions, I have worked with many people at McGill (including SSMU's executives, union organizers on campus and interested students) to put information out about the strike. This included coordinating the creation of a listserv/website message you may have seen, as well as an FAQ sheet on the strike. Being SSMU's point-person for relations with other campus unions, I have been to countless meetings of McGill's inter-union council, which has allowed SSMU to be kept up-to-date with the latest developments of the strike and campus unions' bargaining process.

To cap all this off, I was part of a group of people that helped organize the first meeting of the Mob Squad, which is independent from SSMU but works on many of the issues we have mandates on as a student union (see above). I plan on continuing to work with this committee of people to organize campus campaigns to make universities more accessible and more mindful of their employees' rights.

Community Affairs

Work with the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee

I meet regularly with H el ene Brisson, the representative of the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee, which SSMU has an agreement with to foster better relations between students and long-term residents of the Milton-Park neighbourhood (a.k.a. the McGill Ghetto to some folks). The major event of this part of my portfolio has been organizing the annual Frosh Street Team. This activity involved organizing pairs of students and long-term residents to walk around the neighbourhood during the nights of Frosh. This allowed us to both see where frictions arose between residents and students, and to remind people participating in Frosh activities to be mindful of their neighbours and to keep hydrated (by giving them free water-bottles). Organizing this street team allowed us to collect the information we need to inform what I hope will be a broad discussion on how to lessen the impact of Frosh on the broader Montreal community while making sure students are safe and, yes, having fun.

I have also been organizing a joint event with MPCC which will take place on September 17th. This event required city approval since we're closing off Aylmer Street between Prince Arthur and Milton. Expect music, BBQ'ed food, and people, organizations and businesses from the community. Noon to 4 pm, this Saturday – be there!

Community Engagement Committee

I have been working with Senator Max Luke to set up this Committee (formerly known as the Charity Committee, it allocates the money contained in the Charity Fund). We have managed to clarify its goals, and began recruit members at large. We have also developed some ideas for the committee which we hope to discuss in the near future at the committee's first meeting of the year. These ideas include:

- Asking committee members-at-large to participate in one community project during their term, in order for the committee to act as a hub of community engagement and facilitate the process of putting students in touch with community organizations in need of volunteers.
- Having half the fund be allocated to Humanitarian Aid projects and the other half to local community development initiatives that have difficulty finding funding from governments or charitable agencies (like Centraide).
- Having the committee be chaired by a remunerated commissioner (see below).

SSMU Affairs

Aside from providing support to Shyam as we approached different providers for the 2nd floor space (and participating in many of the other projects other executives have mentioned in their reports in a supporting capacity), some of the work I've been doing on the strictly organizational side of things has involved hiring people to work under my portfolio.

First, the executive committee decided to hire a new Political Attaché and Researcher named Simon Charbonneau (this position is permanent). A very competent researcher, he has worked on Parliament Hill and on social media/marketing campaigns in a different capacity. He starts at SSMU on September 19th – you'll get a chance to meet him soon!

The exec has also hired a Political Campaigns Coordinator, Niko Block. So far he has worked on creating material, booking tables, and event organizing (specifically, working on an event co-organized with QPIRG and CKUT on September 27th at 6 pm in Leacock 232, on the student movement and how it can broaden its actions beyond the issue of tuition fees).

I still plan on hiring a Community Affairs Coordinator to work on SSMU's joint events with the Milton-Park Citizens' Committee and am currently in the process of interviewing candidates.

The executive has also approved the principle of remunerating the chair of the Community Engagement Committee (this would be similar to the Environment Commissioners or Equity Commissioners). Exactly how much and what this person's responsibilities would be, still need to be decided upon.

Other

A major part of my work as a SSMU Executive has been to field interviews with campus and major news sources. Part of the reason for my taking this on is that I have experience speaking to the media which some executives don't have or have to a lesser extent, and because I can speak French. Here is a bucket list of media sources that have interviewed me and the topics they were reporting on:

- Tuition hikes: All three campus newspapers, CJAD 800 AM (ask me about it!)
- MUNACA strike: The Gazette, Radio-Canada TV and radio, all three campus papers
- HMB's contract: McGill Daily
- McGill 17th in the rankings: CBC's Montreal team

Finally, I'd like to extend to all Councillors a warm welcome to SSMU Council. Never hesitate to approach me with any question, idea or concern.