New Updates:

Campus Advocacy

Time Zone Concerns for International Students: There are concerns among international students surrounding their ability to a) attend class and b) take exams in a remote learning environment, provided they may be taking class from around the world. It is not reasonable to expect a student to attend class or write an exam at 3am local time, nor is it reasonable to expect that student to un-enroll for the Fall due to this barrier, especially provided these are pandemic-related measures.

The UMSU VPA, VPSL, and President met with Laurie Schnarr to discuss these concerns on July 17th. Laurie noted professor’s workload limitations and academic integrity concerns in allowing a system of staggered testing to accommodate for time zones, though she did say all professors will be encouraged to record and post lectures. When given recommendations by the UMSU team, she noted that academics are not her ‘wheelhouse,’ and suggested the VPA set up a meeting with Mark Torchia (Vice Provost Teaching and Learning) to further explore these options. This meeting is being scheduled.

Privacy Concerns Re: Respondus Lockdown Browser: A number of students have reached out to the VPA with concerns surrounding Lockdown Browser:

“...use of the Lockdown browser begins and ends cheating-prevention at requiring students to install malware on the device they use to write the exam... I hope the Student Union agrees that requiring students to install a program that is spyware at best and actively impedes use of the device outside of the examination period at worst is a gross violation of our rights.”

“I am wondering if the lockdown browser is an invasion of privacy and if it is against the law? Is it within the department of mathematics rights to use this program?”

In response, the VPA reached out to Patrick McCarthy, Director of Information Security and Compliance at IST on June 30th. The Director replied same day noting they would look into it and that the department had assigned a team to investigate. The VPA followed up on July 20th, at which point a representative at IST noted that “Information Security is working with both The Centre and the Access and Privacy Office to pull together some information on Lockdown Browser for students,” and that they are collaborating with Mark Torchia. The VPA will follow up on this issue at her meeting with Mark Torchia.

Safe change rooms at the ALC: A student reached out to the UMSU VPA and LGBTTQ representative with concerns regarding the safety of the change rooms at the ALC, specifically for those in the trans community. These concerns included but were not limited to: safety of communal shower spaces, the need to improve privacy at the single-person showers, lack of space to dispose of feminine hygiene products in the men’s room, and the broad inadequacy of the community change area.

The UMSU President, VPA, and LGBTTQ representative will be meeting with a group of students at large (including two trans students) to better understand the ALC limitations and develop a strategy in approaching the ALC, Physical Plant, and/or Administration.
Provincial Advocacy

Provincial Pre-Budget Submission
UMSU has decided to prepare a pre-budget submission to the Province of Manitoba to re-highlight the recommendations presented in June, in a more refined manner. Due in October.

Federal Advocacy

UCRU
- UCRU will be submitting a pre-budget submission to the federal government on August 7th
  - Five recommendations:
    1. Expand undergraduate research awards to 3,400 students in the social sciences, humanities, and health fields, which represents a 15 million dollar investment
    2. Continue sections of the COVID student support package
      - Implement a two-year grace period on all federal student loans.
      - Double the Canada Student Grants for the 2021 federal budget.
    3. Make $20 million available to support work-integrated learning programs for domestic and international students.
    4. Additional funding made available for reconciliation initiatives in the amount of $100 millions dollars
      - Includes the expansion of eligible projects of the Indigenous Languages Component of the Indigenous Languages and Cultures Program to include creation or further development of accredited Indigenous Studies programs by non-Indigenous led post-secondary institutions.
    5. Ensure high-speed internet is accessible for all Canadians by 2030 and reduce the costs associated with cell and wireless services by 25 per cent

*These are not exhaustive of the content of UCRU’s lobby week briefs, as not all content of those briefs are budget-based, ie. Changes to the PR legislation for International Students.

- UCRU Chair and Vice Chair have presented a formalization timeline to the Governance Chair

CASA
The UMSU VPA is scheduled to attend the CASA PoliStrat conference from July 27th – 30th.
Projects

Internet Sticks:
After the Province of Manitoba rejected the COVID-19 ask related to the provision of internet sticks for ~ 2000 U of M students with poor internet quality, the VPA reached out to the VP Community Engagement for collaboration on a partnership proposal with TELUS to provide the sticks.

Upon completion of the letter it was found that UMSU was beyond the submission deadline for partnership proposals, and so, the letter will now be directed to a different telecom company (i.e. Rogers, Bell).

Continuing Updates:

Campus Advocacy

Study Accommodations: After meeting with Laurie Schnarr (Vice Provost Students) and Lisa O’Hara, (University Librarian) UMSU has succeeded in making bookable, socially distanced study space available on campus in the Fall 2020 remote term. The details on this are still being ironed out and an official announcement will be made later on. Specifically, administration in collaboration with UMSU is attempting to determine mechanisms for ensuring the most at-risk students have access to this space first.

Provincial Advocacy

Follow-Up with the Hon. Minister Eichler and Minister Fielding:
On June 23rd, the UMSU VPA sent a thank you email to the offices of Minister Fielding and Minister Eichler, with follow-up questions attached. Since then, two email follow-ups have been sent with no response from Eichler’s office, and a notice of receipt from Fielding. No questions have been addressed.

Meeting with Hon. Sarah Guillemand, Minister of Climate and Conservation
The UMSU VPA along with UMSU’s Strategy and Research Advisor attended a meeting at the constituency office of Sarah Guillemand on June 26th. Topics presented included updates on U of M Sustainability initiatives, OERs from the perspective of environmental sustainability, and the discussion of a project to direct biogas from the Brady Landfill to the U of M to replace natural gas.

Minister Guillemand took to the Brady Landfill proposition and encouraged UMSU to acts as the liaisons for garnering collaboration and support among necessary actors in anticipation of the announcement of the Provincial Government’s Climate and Green Fund.

Kyle Hiebert (SRA) began to liaise with city and campus actors, which allowed the VPA and President to meet with Deputy Mayor Markus Chambers who endorsed the project and noted he would do so in writing.

However, the U of M Office of Sustainability is uncomfortable making a bid for a fund at this time as they are currently working on the project independently through their own research and advocacy.
Federal Advocacy

Conference Report: CASA Foundations

From May 26th – 28th, I virtually attended the CASA Foundations Conference.

CASA is a federal advocacy coalition with whom UMSU is in its second year of observer status and considering joining. CASA membership would be ~$56,000 as that is the capped cost for a large student union.

Foundations is CASA’s first conference in their multi-step process toward the development of advocacy priorities for their lobby week. Due to the strong staffing at CASA, the organization lobbies year-round, presenting to federal committees, publishing policy papers, and maintaining rapport with Ottawa, but makes sure to consult its members on contents for lobby week while continually keeping members updated with any other undertakings.

Over the course of the conference, delegates from member schools and observer schools came together for an introduction to the organization and initial brainstorming of 2020-2021 advocacy priorities. Based on these priorities, the home office writes a pre-budget submission which is reviewed and approved by board at PoliStrat. These priorities will also inform the lobby week briefs. Some notable sessions of the conference include the “political climate update,” “policy development and research” and “Canadian PSE Policy in Context.”

While CASA is incredibly well organized, transparent, and member-driven, there is a noticeable lack of the ‘big’ schools, namely U15 Research Universities like the U of Manitoba, Western, McGill, Queens, U of Saskatchewan, Waterloo, UBC and U of T, who instead advocate to the federal government as a U15 block known as UCRU.

Nonetheless, CASA as an organization is populated with diverse groups of student unions across its 23 members, including Red River College, U of Alberta, and Acadia, as well as and a range of polytechnics like Kwantlen. To account for this diversity, which can result in different priorities, CASA maintains a Graduate Advisory Group and Polytechnic Advisory Group. With this system, even if specific priorities do not make it into the official lobby week documents, CASA can still advocate for these items year round on the advice of these sub-divisions. The organization also has an official partnership with Quebec’s UEQ (L’Union étudiante du Québec).

Overall, I commend CASA for its commitment to fostering a participative process for its members and emphasis on evidence-based policy. I found that even as an observer, UMSU was able to speak to its priorities openly in priority brainstorm sessions, and not only be heard by fellow delegates, but actively engaged by the board chair and CASA leadership.
Projects

**Legal Services:** On July 8th, the VPA met with Kyle Hiebert, UMSU Strategy and Research Advisor to further conceptualize the UMSU Legal Service Centre. “Traditional” possibilities, based on frameworks used by student unions across the country, include keeping a lawyer on retainer for students and sharing a lawyer with other student unions through the sharing of retainer costs. These costs could either be budgeted or passed as a student fee.

The VPA is not confident these are reasonable solutions amid COVID-19 budget constraints, and is in the process of drafting letters to Legal Aid MB and Robson Hall Community Law centre to explore partnership opportunities which would come at lesser, limited, or no cost to UMSU.

After speaking with the VP Finance and Operations and UMSU General Manager, it is confirmed that UMSU does possess the physical space to host such a centre should it come to fruition.

**External Events and Meetings Attended:**
*This excludes all meetings internal to the organization.

June 19th – Meeting with Mackenzy Metcalfe RE: UCRU Strategic Planning
June 22nd – Meeting with Vice-Provost Students and University Librarian
June 23rd – Board of Governors Meeting
June 24th – Senate
June 24th – Meeting with Mackenzy Metcalfe RE: UCRU Strategic Planning
June 25th – UMSU Health and Dental Plan Executive Orientation
June 26th – Interview with the Manitoban RE: Remote Learning
June 26th – Meeting with Minister Guillemand
June 30th – Meeting with Mackenzy Metcalfe RE: UCRU Strategic Planning
July 2nd – Meeting with Chair of UCRU Advocacy Committee
July 2nd – UCRU Board Meeting
July 7th – UCRU Advocacy Committee Meeting
July 8th – UCRU Governance Committee Meeting
July 9th – Call with Red River College RE: International student healthcare
July 9th – Meeting with Mackenzy Metcalfe RE: UCRU Strategic Planning
July 14th – Meeting with Chair of UCRU Governance Committee Re: Presentation of Formalization Timeline
July 14th – Emergency Board of Governors Meeting
July 16th – UCRU Board Meeting
July 17th – Meeting with Vice Provost Students Re: Timezones, REES, etc.
July 17th – UCRU Advocacy Committee Meeting
July 21st – UCRU Advocacy Committee Meeting
July 22nd – UCRU Governance Committee Meeting