

SOME THOUGHTS ON A NEW NATIONAL STUDENT ORGANIZATION

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Why a new national organization?

- Clearly, the current organization does not meet the needs of a great many Canadian students.
- The **Vote Education** campaign showed how well a simple coalition could work. We now need to formalize these links somewhat.
- There are two things student organizations must do effectively on a national level if we are to represent our members well:
 - **Communicate** constantly and keep one another informed of everything that's going on at our schools.
 - **Lobby** as one voice on certain pressing issues of national concern, including EPF, Canada Student Loans, and research funding.

What we don't need:

- Top-down governance and infringement on individual school's freedom to represent their students.
- In-fighting on issues of structure and non-educational concerns.
- A plethora of largely irrelevant businesses and services.

But how could it work?

- The first question must be "what do we actually need?" I believe the answer is simple: Communication with one another must be our first priority. Knowing what issues others are facing, and lending them our expertise, can only make us all stronger.
- Lobbying, too, is important, but far more difficult. If we can gain broad consensus on message, then we should do it. If we cannot, however, achieve this level of agreement, we shouldn't let this failure affect the way we work together. Lobbying, then, is the second priority.

¹ **Standard Disclaimer:** Though I am President of The Students' Union, The University of Calgary, the thoughts expressed herein are my own and not those of my Council. No additives or preservatives. Return contents in original box for full refund.

So, what do we do?

- Let's examine closely the model of the Council of Alberta University Students. CAUS is an unincorporated body, with no office and no full-time staff. It is also, in my mind, the most effective student organization in the country, partly because of this lack of structure. Ideas and consensus **must** percolate from the bottom-up, because that is the only way they can come.
- I favour the use of a CAUS model. Our organization should have only one executive member — a part-time volunteer Chair, drawn from the membership. To aid the Chair, we should hire a part-time Administrator — a student who would help with minute-taking, faxing, and so on.
- The main goal is communication, and that would be facilitated technologically. The organization would have a fax and e-mail network which would distribute information across the membership. I favour Internet access being a requirement of membership. This way, we could set up a list server so that information from a particular school could be received by all schools within minutes at no cost.
- In addition to the schools posting information requests and interesting facts over the network, there could be a monthly e-mail newsletter administered by either the Chair or a volunteer editor.
- We could also tap into one another's press clipping services and have a weekly national press clippings file sent out.

Well, Naheed, that sounds cool. What other concerns are there?

There are a few issues we need to discuss in far more detail, but if we are united on the basic structure, these will not sink us.

- **Membership** — Should we include Graduate Student Associations? What about colleges and technical institutes? What about the old bogeyman — CFS members?
- **Voting** — I see this as a consensus-based organization, so this is not a huge deal. But options include one school-one vote, weighted voting, and a double majority system.
- **Funding** — The simplest and easiest way to do this is simply to charge each school, regardless of size, a flat annual membership fee of, say \$500 to cover costs. Any surplus at the end of the year would be transferred to the new Chair, and the fee structure would be reviewed periodically. The very smallest schools could be offered a reduced rate if they truly could not afford \$500.
- **Name** — We have to have one, but no one can think of one. National Student Alliance? Canadian Alliance of Student Associations? NASA? Canadian Student Federation? What? I'm sure all these student leaders, supposedly the best and brightest, can come up with something.

I look forward to seeing you all at Winds of Change, and discussing this idea further.