



St. Thomas University

Tel: (506) 452-0502

Fax: (506) 452-0633

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Tyler (Ty) MaGee
President
St. Thomas University Students' Union
Email: su_president@stu.ca

Sydonia Chandon
Vice-President Education
St. Thomas University Students' Union
Email: su_vped@stu.ca

Alex Nguyen
Vice-President Administration
St. Thomas University Students' Union
Email: su_vpadmin@stu.ca

Victoria Young
Vice-President Student Life
St. Thomas University Students' Union
Email: su_vpsl@stu.ca

Dear: Tyler, Sydonia, Alex, and Victoria:

Thank you for the information you provided on June 28, 2021 regarding the “asks” that you developed based on the recent Counter the Costs Campaign, as well as the letter of June 4, 2021 regarding the charging of interest on unpaid tuition fees for the Academic Year 2021-22.

Our meeting of July 7, 2021 was very helpful in providing greater context for several of the proposals that you made. The following are highlights from that discussion, including some action items that we committed to pursuing.

a. Creating an emergency bursary fund that replicates the Student Union’s EB plan

The University has bursary funds, an emergency fund (Sister Elizabeth Legere) and emergency bursary funds created in response to the pandemic. Normally, there is a formal communique sent annually in the fall advising students of the availability of bursary funds and how to apply. The process for emergency bursary funds is perhaps less well known. Action item: The University will review the information that is on the STU website to ensure that the process for applying for bursaries and emergency bursaries is clearly communicated. This information will also be shared

with the Students' Union so that they can add a link to the relevant STU website on the Students' Union website.

b. Providing equity in bursary and scholarships so all students are eligible for scholarships

The criteria for bursaries and scholarships that are funded by donations are determined in accordance with the wishes of donors and are subject to Senate approval. All students who meet the criteria are eligible for consideration. It is our understanding that your ask is to have some bursaries and scholarships for students from marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ students. Action item: We will share this information with the Advancement Office so that this can be taken into consideration in discussions with donors who wish to establish new scholarships or bursaries. However, it should be noted that it is preferable to have eligibility criteria that are more flexible as opposed to being restrictive, to make the awards available to the largest number of students possible. See item c below which touches on a similar topic.

c. Transferring surplus funds from redundant scholarships to gift students in financial need

At the meeting, you explained what you meant by “redundant” scholarships as scholarships where the criteria are restrictive to the point that the scholarships are sometimes not awarded because students do not meet the scholarship criteria. After consultation with the Advancement Office, I can advise that our current practice, when establishing new awards, is to use the language “first preference given to” so that there is some flexibility in the eligibility criteria.

d. The International Student Representative proposed suspending interest charges on international students' tuition for the upcoming academic year (letter of June 4, 2021)

We have compared our practices regarding collection of unpaid tuition fees with other universities and concluded that our practices are more flexible than most other universities. For example, STU does not charge a late payment fee, which is a common practice in the sector. We recently created a form for students to use to prepare a payment plan, which is available at https://www.stu.ca/tuition_fees/.

The University is not able to suspend the practice of charging interest on unpaid tuition fees. This practice applies to both domestic and international students. Interest charges reflect the value of money over time. Students start receiving the service at the beginning of the academic year; therefore, our practice of only charging interest on unpaid tuition fees during the second semester is more than reasonable.

e. Reaching out to more community members to donate to scholarships or COVID-19 relief funds

Fundraising is an ongoing responsibility of the President's Office and the Advancement Office, with all requests coordinated through these offices. As with many other activities of the University, fundraising progress has been slowed because of COVID-19. Restricted travel has had an impact on our ability to conduct in-person visits to prospective donors, which is essential for larger gifts.

There have been new scholarships and bursaries, including an Emergency Bursary Fund in response to COVID-19, established in the last few years as part of the University's Capital Campaign. To date, more than half of the monies raised under the Campaign have been

designated for scholarships or bursaries (\$7.52M) with most of those funds being received as endowments. While this is a significant amount for new scholarships and bursaries, only the income from the endowed funds is available for use on an annual basis. This is but one of the reasons that fundraising for scholarships will continue to be an ongoing priority going forward, with the recognition that scholarship funding is the University's area of greatest need.

f. Once students are enrolled, we ask for a predicted break-down for the tenure of their degree; tuition increases should not be a surprise as students must be able to plan

Due to not being able to accurately predict enrolment, provincial operating grant revenue, and other significant operating items over multiple years, the practice at universities is to set tuition fees annually. At STU, through our regular budget process, we normally provide an estimate of the following year's tuition fees in the annual Budget Development Report and as part of the annual Town Hall in February and March, respectively. You indicated that students are often preoccupied with mid-terms and other academic pursuits at that time of year and therefore do not tend to engage in the budget feedback opportunities that are provided. Action item: The University will consider sending out the Budget Development Report earlier in the winter term (January).

I hope this reflects accurately the highlights of our discussions and the action items.

Sincerely,



Lily Fraser
Vice-President (Finance and Administration)

Copy: Dawn Russell, President and Vice-Chancellor
Reg Gallant, Comptroller