

SMUSA President's Report

Shiray Tan, President & CEO

Internal Affairs

Welcome Weeks

SMUSA's Welcome Weeks unofficially ended last Friday after a successful 14 days, with Society and Partners Expo being postponed due to the weather. We held 15 events including Husky Festival, Welcome to the Gorsebrook, and many more other events. 4 of our events surpassed the event venue capacity, suggesting an increased student engagement compared to last year. With student engagement being one of our top three priorities this year, we are very excited for what the future holds and are committed to building upon this success to make SMUSA an even more vibrant and engaging organization for our students.

Throughout Welcome Weeks, we have been collecting feedback from students as to what we could have done better in those events, and what events they would like to see in the future. We had approximately 200 feedback responses and will be incorporating what we learned from them into our planning for future events and initiatives.

Scholarship Cut

On June 29, SMUSA was informed that the Top-Up program had been removed, and the achievement award budget was reduced. Initially, we were told that the university had cut approximately \$1,000,000 from its financial aid operational budget. In response, we conducted a survey with 69 respondents and presented our findings to the university with the following requests:

- 1) Increase the amount of financial aid provided through scholarships and bursaries.
- 2) Enhance financial aid support for students who were impacted.
- 3) Improve communications and transparency with students regarding scholarship funding updates.
- 4) Seek consultation with the SMUSA team during the scholarship review process.

Following our advocacy efforts, the university reported raising \$600,000 for student financial aid through trusts and endowments. However, there were conflicting statements regarding the extent of the cuts, with the most recent update suggesting that no cuts were made. We are currently requesting for the university to provide detailed calculations, and remain committed to ensuring that affected students receive the necessary support during this situation.

Hiring

In the summer, we let go of Khuloud Saqib and hired Amy Wilson as the new Vice President of Events and Engagement. We thank both Khuloud and Amy for all they have done as both of their efforts were crucial in the execution of Fall Welcome Weeks 2023.

All positions for SMUSA Student Managers, Gorsebrook Lounge bartenders, Door Staff, Information Desk Staff, Liquor Services Staff, and Husky Patrol Drivers have been successfully filled. We look forward to working with our dedicated team members in the upcoming year.

We have recently posted the job opportunity for the Board Secretary position and will be opening applications for the Street Team position in the coming month.

Annual Plan

Over the summer, the SMUSA executive team collaborated to establish our three key pillars for the year: Student Engagement, Student Support, and Representation. Under these pillars, we've outlined specific goals and action items that will guide our efforts throughout the year. We are currently in the final stage of refining this plan and anticipate presenting the final draft to the board in October.

External Affairs

Students Nova Scotia

SMUSA's VP Advocacy, Anubhav Gupta, was elected as the Chair of the Governance Committee for Students Nova Scotia for 2023-2024. Shiray Tan and Anubhav Gupta also serve on all three Committees for the organization – Policy, Membership, and Governance.

Over the summer SMUSA's SNS Delegates, Shiray Tan and Anubhav Gupta, attended the Annual General Meeting for Students Nova Scotia at Cape Breton University to meet with other Student Unions and Associations across the province. This conference allowed the SNS Board to decide on its Action Plan for the upcoming year. SMUSA was able to advocate for its students effectively, and our top advocacy priorities like financial aid & tuition, housing, mental health, and a lot more are reflected in that plan.

The SMUSA executive team attended the 2023 Maritime Student Congress (MSC) hosted by Students Nova Scotia (SNS) and the New Brunswick Student Alliance (NBSA) at St. Thomas University. Joined with other Student Unions and Student Associations from the Maritime provinces, the conference allowed delegates to discuss student issues, attend training sessions to become a better student leader, and educational sessions about various topics such as policy making, data analytics, and Indigenous culture.

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations

In May, Shiray Tan and Anubhav Gupta attended the Foundations Conference in Ottawa with the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. During the conference, the team was busy collaborating with other Student Unions and Associations across the country to discuss advocacy priorities for the upcoming year. A few issues that were discussed included financial aid, housing, mental health, OERs, and graduate student research funding.

In July, Shiray Tan and Anubhav Gupta also attended CASA's Policy and Strategy Conference hosted at St. Thomas University. During this conference, the team discussed some of the most pressing issues students are facing across the country, while finalizing the Board of Directors' Action Plan and Committee work plans for the upcoming year.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The Memorandum of Understanding is an agreement between the Government of Nova Scotia and all Nova Scotia Universities which was negotiated in 2019 and is set to expire on March 31st, 2024. The MOU defines the relationship between the Provincial Government and all universities across Nova Scotia and how they can collaborate and strategically work together.

Shiray Tan and Anubhav Gupta attended multiple meetings over the summer with the Department of Advanced Education. The most notable being the Government-Student Roundtable (GSR) held on August 21, 2023. At the GSR, along with other student unions and associations from the province, SMUSA was able to meet with the Deputy Minister, Nancy McLellan, and raise the student voice for this very important negotiation. Some key concerns brought to the Government's notice while they negotiate this agreement with universities were high tuition, inadequate financial aid, the housing crisis, food insecurity, and EDIA concerns.