



Office of the **VICE PRESIDENT EXTERNAL**

Conner Peta
Vice-President External
403-329-2780
su.external@uleth.ca

Report: Canadian Alliance
of Student Associations
(CASA) Foundations
Conference, Ottawa, Ontario

As part of our commitments to the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), President Hailey Babb and I attended the CASA Foundations Conference 2017, from May 22-May 26, in Ottawa, Ontario. The overall point of the conference was to transition the new primary and secondary delegates to CASA from our 21 member institutions. It was a fantastic opportunity to meet and interact with student leaders from across the country. Monday, May 22nd was a travel day for me and Hailey. We made it to Ottawa in time to register for the conference and to participate in the social icebreakers session, where delegates from each school would introduce themselves and list one interesting fact about their institutions. Apart from those two activities, the rest of that evening was spent getting to know our peers, and preparing for the start of the conference. In short, the conference was a great experience for me, and a tremendous success. For me, I was elected by my peers to serve on the Federal Policy Committee. It was an honour, and I am very excited to be involved in the policy making process for CASA.

On Tuesday, May 23rd, the conference opened at 9:00am with an opening address from a First Nations Elder who acknowledged the Algonquin People, the people whose traditional land the conference took place on. It was a very informative, moving, and humbling experience. From 9:30-9:45 am, we did a brief overview of CASA's Code of Conduct. At 9:45 we had our first Plenary, where the members voted in a Plenary Chair and Recording Secretary until we elected a new board. We then did a broad overview of CASA, including CASA's policies, its governance, its resources, and its operations. We then broke for lunch. After lunch, we spent the rest of the afternoon breaking into groups and discussing the student issues that mattered to all of us. As the ULSU VP External, I brought up issues such as parking, mental health funding, student financial aid, and funding for indigenous students. It was a very productive afternoon, what I took most out of it was the fact that so many students from across the country, and from a variety of backgrounds, had a lot of common ground on issues relevant to students. It was after that session that I knew it would be a great year. Later that evening, the CASA delegates participated in an escape room challenge as part of a teambuilding activity.

The conference resumed at 9:00am on Wednesday May 24th, when the Canada Student Loans



Office of the **VICE PRESIDENT EXTERNAL**

Program (CSLP) presented to our conference. They gave us a broad overview of many of the changes to the CSLP over the years, much in part to CASA's advocacy efforts. This included efforts made in the 2017 Budget, which included expanding eligibility to part time students, students with dependents, and adults returning to school after several years in the workforce. After that, the World University Students of Canada (WUSC) presented to us about their initiatives and the work that they do to give refugees from across the world a chance to pursue post-secondary education in Canada. As the WUSC club on campus was able to successfully campaign for a \$1.00 student levy this year at the University of Lethbridge, it was nice to see how our campus club aligns perfectly with the goals of the national organization. One of the most tragic stats I learned was that 1 out of every 113 people in the world are displaced, and in that refugee population, only 1% of refugees have access to higher education. Next, Abacus Data presented to us on the importance of the voice of young people in politics, and how millennials can make a difference at the polls. One of the more interesting things that they noted was that the increase in youth voter turnout in the 2015 election was one of the reasons the Federal Liberal Party got a majority government, and not a minority. It was very exciting to hear about how the youth, and how students in particular, can be such a strong voice in the electoral process. After the presentation by Abacus Data, we had a brief overview of the role of the Federal Government in Post-Secondary Education in Canada, followed by a brief overview of issues of Copyright, including fair dealing. Following that, we had the privilege of inviting Dr. Ross Finney, professor at the University of Ottawa's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, and Director of the Educational Policy Research Initiative (EPRI), to the conference to discuss his research on employment outcomes for graduates. It was a very informative presentation, and the question and answer period that followed was quite enlightening. Later that evening, me and my fellow CASA delegates had the honour and privilege to participate in a First Nations Blanket Exercise, led by the Algonquin Elder who opened our conference. It was a very emotional and real look through the historical experience of First Nations peoples in Canada. Although it was very emotional, in light of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it was very informative, and education, I believe, is one of the fundamental tools needed for reconciliation.

The conference resumed on Thursday, May 25th, it was the longest day of the conference. The day began at 9:00 am with a public affairs workshop by Impact Public Affairs. Unfortunately, I had to miss the majority of this session because I had to call into a very important University of Lethbridge committee meeting that was happening in Lethbridge. However, that ended early enough for me to participate in the Advocacy and Government Practical Training/ Media Training Practical Workshops. It was very valuable, and complimented the advocacy training I have received from CAUS. We then had a political climate update, where we discussed a wide



THE UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE
STUDENTS' UNION

Office of the **VICE PRESIDENT EXTERNAL**

range of topics from the Conservative and NDP Leadership races, to Canada-U.S. relations, to softwood lumber disputes and intellectual property. After that, we had a brief session on lobbying and what to expect from now until our policy and strategy meeting in July. Following that session, we had a short break, and then the conference resumed at 7:00pm for our Board of Directors Update and Board of Directors Elections meeting. It went from 7:00pm to about 12:00 am. Although there was a lot of debate, we were able to elect our new Board of Directors, and I am excited for the upcoming year and to work closely with our new Board.

Friday, March 26th, was the last day of the conference. The day began at 9:00 am with a financial update from CASA's Executive Director. After that, there was a brief overview of building tools for effective Advocacy, including using basecamp and highrise. After that, we had a group discussion on post-secondary themes at CASA, where we discussed issues ranging from federal grants, to mental health, to parking. After lunch, we had our closing plenary, where we elected permanent members to CASA's standing committees. I put my name forward to run for CASA's Federal Policy Committee. I decided to pursue this because of one of the fundamental promises I made during my campaign, which was that I would look into to parental income as a factor for the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP), and see if CASA can advocate for the elimination of parental income as a factor. I was honoured to have been elected to this committee.

In conclusion, CASA's Foundations Conference was a great experience, it was great to interact with various student leaders from across the country, and I am very excited for the upcoming year.

Conner Peta

Conner Peta
Vice-President External