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Conference Report: CAUS Planning Conference, January 27 – 28, 2020

What is the CAUS Planning Conference

The CAUS Planning Conference comes as a result of multiple changes made by the provincial government with regards to post-secondary matters. In previous years, this time of year would have been dedicated to another CAUS Counterparts conference. However, for factors mentioned previously, it was decided by membership that this time would be better used as a dedicated time to plan out a campaign as well as work on the strategic plan for CAUS. It took place in Calgary over two full days, of which I will expand on below.

Monday, January 27th

The first day began at 10:30am to account for the members who had to travel from Edmonton or Lethbridge. I travelled up the day before and was able to complete some work before the day began. We started off with an overview of our priorities. As there were multiple changes made by the provincial government which affected our priorities (such as the removal of the STEP program), we decided to work through what we have and see how we could change them to reflect the current environment of PSE. We focused heavily on performance based funding as it was a recently announced change from the government which holds the potential to be extremely destructive to universities, specifically with a focus on liberal arts. We also made some marginal changes in wording/structure to our priorities involving mental health, sexual violence prevention, affordability, and work-integrated learning. The updated document should be available within the coming weeks on the CAUS website. We then held a brainstorming session to cover the required updates to CAUS's strategic plan. To be frank – there was a lot. I was happy to bring a lot of what I have learned from the ULSU strategic planning committee to this session and truly felt like we made significant groundwork in this regard. The day then ended with an optional social event, which I did end up skipping to spend time with my family.

Tuesday, January 28th

The second day started off much earlier beginning at 8:30am sharp. We were lucky enough to have Brandon Simmons (AUSU President) and Duncan Wojtaszek (AUSU Governance and Advocacy Coordinator) as guests for the morning to direct the session on campaign planning. Both parties were extremely helpful in guiding discussion and offering input when there were opportunities. Duncan did an excellent job coordinating our brainstorming session, not just with respect to the type of campaign we wanted to pursue, but also with respect to the reactions and audiences we were trying to reach. After a brief break, we continued on the subject of campaign planning. We covered a discussion session around what we felt worked well and what didn't with the federal GOTV campaign, which all present parties participated in. This helped to highlight areas of outreach we may want to pursue with our planned provincial campaign and areas we may not want to bother putting in the effort and resources. We continued into specific capacities and



intentions of each institution with regards to a campaign, which really helped to outline where specific institutions can support each other as well as an overall direction which can be best supported by everyone. After lunch, the day concluded with a CAUS meeting which was relatively standard. Bailey and I then headed back down to Lethbridge in the afternoon which concluded the conference.

Final Thoughts

Overall, this was an extremely productive campaign. To be very candid, there has been a lot of uncertainty around what we as CAUS should do in response/as a message to government. This conference definitely helped to set a direction and begin some vital groundwork around this. We also had a great discussion session around the strategic plan for CAUS which, given how outdated the “current” one is, was a very welcome session. Admittedly, it was quite unfortunate we had to cancel the counterparts conference. This would have been a very important session to speak with other portfolios heading into the last leg of everyone’s term. Despite this, I am very happy about what we did with what we had.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read my report. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by email or phone.

Best regards,

Andrew Gammack
President