



Office of the Vice President Student Affairs

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May 2020 Report
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Territorial Acknowledgement

Oki, I acknowledge and honour the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). The City of Lethbridge is also part of the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III. The Blackfoot name of the University of Lethbridge is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. Thank you for the privilege of working, learning, and living in this place. I am grateful and I am committed to doing my part in responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action in my day-to-day life.

Adapted from: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/indigenous/cultural-protocol> and https://www.uleth.ca/sites/default/files/2019/08/final_territorial_statements_june_2019.pdf

Introductions

Challenging times call for creative solutions. The majority of my time and energy this month has been invested to rethinking all of the initiatives that the VP Student Affairs typically runs and adapting it to an online format. COVID-19 has significantly impacted the student experience, but there are opportunities to explore new types of programming that has never been done before. At the end of the day, I want to do my best to support students during this difficult time by giving them opportunities to connect to resources and connect with each other. If you ever want to get in contact with me, shoot me an email and I'll be happy to connect with you.



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Fresh Fest

Fresh Fest is an iconic component of the University of Lethbridge experience. Many meetings were had about how to move forward with Fresh Fest while taking into account all the public health directives and safety of attendees. Unfortunately, with the university announcing that classes will primarily be online in the Fall, this means an in-person Fresh Fest like previous years is not feasible. According to the Alberta government's relaunch strategy, Fresh Fest would fit into the category of events in Stage 3. However, the physical distancing measure of 2 meters apart would have still been in place at Stage 3, meaning a drastic reduction in the number of attendees that would have been permitted. The safety of our attendees is of the utmost importance.

Despite there not being an in-person Fresh Fest, I have been exploring alternatives. A committee of passionate and creative individuals have been hired and we are excited to bring you an awesome experience to welcome back students and kickoff the year. Stay tuned for more details.

Clubs

Having been heavily involved with clubs previously, I understand how uncertain clubs are feeling right now with this upcoming year. What will happen with their club activities? How will they maintain their membership? Will they still be able to use any of the spaces on campus? What will happen to Clubs Week? These are the questions that I am currently working with other Students' Union staff to answer and provide clearer guidelines for clubs moving forward. As with Fresh Fest, we want to follow public health directives, but still encourage club activities when possible. School is more than just going to classes, with clubs forming a significant component of the student experience outside of the classroom.

My general approach with clubs this year is to empower them with the necessary tools and resources for them to be successful this upcoming year. This means providing a "How-To" guide for online programming, running training sessions, co-hosting events with clubs, rethinking how we promote clubs, and encouraging collaboration.



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Online Programming

Also new this year is online programming. This was driven by the importance of connection during a time of social distancing. After researching what other universities have been doing for online programming, I have compiled a list of potential activities that I have been testing out. In May, we hosted bingo on Instagram live with an awesome host (@suitandtiebingoguy) from Wilfred Laurier University. We also hosted Meme Time with Cayley Fleischman (Arts & Science Rep), and the “We’re Not Really Strangers” card game with myself. I would consider these a successful first try and I definitely want to keep exploring creative ways to engage with students. My intention is to have online programming run regularly throughout the summer and into the Fall semester, so students have a fun way to connect with another.

COCA

Our Students’ Union is a member of COCA, which is the Canadian Organization of Campus Activities. It connects campus event coordinators, campus club administrators, and student union marketing managers from across the nation. Typically, a Student Life Summit is hosted annually in June, but this has been cancelled due to COVID-19. However, the roundtable discussions and workshops around student life are still being offered online. I have been attending them as part of my professional development and with the intention of bringing back great ideas to our campus. It has been reassuring to hear how other Students’ Unions are coping across the nation and we have been sharing resources on how to move forward.

Indigenous Relations Committee

A central part of my campaign platform was working towards Truth and Reconciliation and building greater inclusivity for Indigenous peoples on our campus. I initiated the creation of an Indigenous Relations Committee (IRC), which will serve a consistent base for our Students’ Union to engage with the work of Truth and Reconciliation. The IRC is being co-chaired by Ryan Lindblad (VP External) and Toni Pashe (Indigenous Representative), with a focus on reviewing our policies, services, and advocacy, to better support Indigenous peoples. This will certainly be a long-term process and our goal is to have the IRC ratified as a standing committee, so that this work will continue for years to come.



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Student Support Working Group

In late April, the Provost's Task Force on Online Teaching and Learning was struck up with the purpose of providing recommendations about how to proceed with summer and Fall classes. Multiple working groups were struck up and consisted of staff, faculty, and students working together. I sat on the Student Support Working Group and provided my input on what supports are important for students, such as considerations of access to technology, residence life, and online learning support. The culmination of the Task Force was presenting 10 key recommendations, which the university is now using to guide the remaining summer courses and into the Fall. See the video from the University of Lethbridge Town Hall on May 20, 2020 for more details (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfWxYLYwUUE&feature=youtu.be>)

Now that these recommendations have been presented, the work is now on implementation. The Task Force and its working groups will be continuing. I will be sitting on the "Successful Online Learning" and "Online Support Services and Strong Community" working groups to provide further input. In the area of Successful Online Learning, there have been a series of online learning success workshops hosted by Jaime Morasch, the Peer Learning Coordinator with the Student Success Centre. The sign up can be found here and you can still book individual Study Skills sessions too (<https://www.uleth.ca/student-success-centre/study-skills>). In the area of Online Support Services and Strong Community, we will be looking into how to maintain a strong sense of community at the University of Lethbridge despite challenges of being physically apart.

Committee Meetings Attended

- Distinguished Teaching Award Selection Committee - May 1
- Student Support Working Group - May 4 and 14
- Student Support Subgroup - Online Learning Success - May 6
- Arts and Science Council - May 7 and 21
- General Assembly - May 7
- ULSU/GSA Executive Meeting - May 12

These are some of the meetings that I have attended to represent the student voice. If you have any questions or want to chat more about this report, please send me an email!

With gratitude,
Richard Lee-Thai