

Articulating the Identity of the Central Student Association at the University of Guelph

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SOLUTIONS

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Background

The Central Student Association (CSA) at the University of Guelph is run by an Executive of four elected Commissioners and a Board of Directors, and supported by permanent staff. The Executive and Board members fulfill one-year terms in office. In an effort to develop a multi-year framework to guide the CSA with consistency beyond the term of any one Executive, the CSA hired Sage Solutions, a strategic consulting firm in Guelph, to facilitate stakeholder engagement and articulate a “Mission Vision Values” (MVV) document for the organization. That document would guide planning, inform the behaviour of the Board, and frame expectations for incoming Executive members. The Board identified developing such a multi-year “credo” for the CSA as the highest priority task this year.

Methodology

Dr. Rebecca Sutherns of Sage Solutions designed and managed this project collaboratively with the Academic and University Affairs Commissioner of the CSA 2016/2017, Meghan Wing.

Information to shape the development of the MVV document was gathered in a variety of ways as follows:

- An electronic survey distributed to undergraduate students through multiple channels over two weeks in November 2016. 4,378 responses were received, representing 17% of the full- and part-time undergraduate population.
- Four focus groups with students. 270 expressed interest following the survey, eight attended.
- Three focus group conversations, with the Executive, Board and permanent staff.
- Two interviews with University of Guelph administrators (VP Student Affairs, Brenda Whiteside, by telephone and Student Life’s Shannon Thibodeau).
- A review of the CSA’s website, by-laws and Letters Patent.
- A review of three previous consultant reports about the governance of the CSA.
- A review of MVV documents from eight Student Associations at comparably sized universities (seven in Ontario, one in Quebec).¹
- A telephone interview with a former Student Association Board Chair from another university.
- An analysis of the demographic profile of Guelph undergraduate students.

Findings from these various sources were compiled into a draft consultation summary report, which was then reviewed by the CSA Board’s CAPCOM (i.e. governance committee), along with two drafts of the proposed “MVV” document.

¹ Direct comparisons with other Student Unions is problematic, as they differ in many ways from the CSA in Guelph, including in terms of their scope of responsibility and ownership of assets. Experiences from

Context

Undergraduate Students at the University of Guelph

The University of Guelph is a mid-size university with roughly 23,000 full-time and 2,740 part-time undergraduate students. It ranks fourth in Canada among comprehensive universities according to the 2017 *Maclean's* annual university rankings, including second in student satisfaction.

An increasing number of secondary school applicants are making the U of G their first choice university (40% growth from 2005-2015 compared to 17% for other Ontario universities). Guelph receives more than seven applications per available undergraduate space. 95.5% of accepted students attain an entrance average above 75%. Based on feedback published in the *Globe and Mail* in 2013, students cite quality of education, close interaction with faculty, a friendly, caring community and a beautiful campus as their main reasons for attending. Guelph is also considered one of the ten best Canadian cities in which to live. At the U of G, over 90% of first year students live in residence on campus.

Although overall undergraduate enrolment is expected to stay stable at Guelph (it is declining in Ontario), the proportion of Aboriginal, transfer, commuter and international students is projected to grow over time. Currently, approximately 5% of first year students are international students.

Most undergraduate students are millennials (age 18-24), who represent the largest generational cohort in the Canadian workforce (37%) and who report being primarily focused on career and financial stability. A recent survey of post-secondary school students identified their top priorities as finding a job they love, finishing their education and paying off student debt. Unemployment rates and tuition rates are a significant concern to this generation. They are also characterized as being tech savvy and driven by values and personal relationships.

The CSA at the University of Guelph

The history of the CSA at the University of Guelph has been documented in several other consultant reports and will not be the focus of this one. There are, however, several current features of the CSA that are directly relevant to the development of a multi-year identity statement. They include:

- Annual mandates for Executive and Board members, against a backdrop of regular student turnover and swings in the pendulum of political ideology within the CSA that have combined to make longer term planning, and staying the course with those plans, difficult. Values and priorities are seen to vary annually based on Executive and Board priorities and behaviour.
- A history of tensions (between the CSA and university Administration; CSA and its staff; CSA and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS); among CSA Executive members etc.) that in some cases have lasted or repeated themselves over several decades.

- A recent pattern of student disengagement with the CSA, exemplified by vacancies on the Board, uncontested elected roles on the Executive, low voter turnout for CSA elections, poor attendance at some meetings etc.
- A governance and staffing structure that is seen as unclear and problematic – even at times dysfunctional. Pending governance and staffing changes may help to address this concern.
- An apparent willingness to admit the organization is broken and needs fixing, with a current Executive willing to tackle that challenge.
- Commissioners who have ambitious job descriptions and who work hard, but often not on the same things as each other or as the previous year’s leaders, at times resulting in a lack of unified leadership and a loss of momentum toward impact.

Findings

Consultation Highlights

Alignment of MVV with the findings of the consultation phase has been an important goal of this project. Detailed findings from the student survey and recurring themes from the other data collection channels have been included as Appendices B and C. Highlights related to the development of MVV are noted here², with other recommendations related to governance and operations noted in later sections.

- I. **Student engagement** was identified as a critical, in four related ways:
 - a. Students want to be better informed about and connected to what the CSA does. Higher and more targeted visibility is needed.
 - b. CSA Executive and many Board members want greater student engagement so that they can be more confident in their mandate as elected representatives. Voter and candidate turnout for elections need to be higher.
 - c. CSA representatives cannot assume to know what students think in the absence of reliable and active mechanisms to solicit their input.
 - d. Students are craving greater transparency and accountability within the CSA, which would result in a higher level of trust within and toward the organization.
 - e. Campaigns need to represent student priorities and voices. As one student said, “Ask for my opinion rather than projecting it.”

² As with any large survey, there were contradictory opinions within the results. Overall themes expressed by the majority of respondents are summarized within this report.

2. Students look to the CSA for **practical support that saves students money and enriches their university experience**. This point was expressed in three primary ways:
 - a. The CSA's role in providing affordable services is seen as a high priority. It should be done consistently well, independent of the ebbs and flows of any specific executive's annual agenda.
 - b. There is a strong desire for any CSA campaign work to be closely connected to practical improvements in students' lives, such as reduced tuition.
 - c. Feedback was mixed in terms of the CSA's role in planning events and activities. Many are appreciated, and the CSA is seen as well positioned to sponsor large-scale events that individual groups on campus could not afford to organize. At the same time, others saw the CSA's role in event planning as a significantly lower priority than several of its other responsibilities, including saving students money, creating a culture of acceptance on campus, and advocating on behalf of students to decision makers.
3. The role of the CSA in **representing undergraduate students to decision makers** is worth highlighting. This role, often on university governance committees, goes beyond campaigns, service and activities and accounts for considerable time spent by the Executive.
4. People want the CSA to **work constructively, positively and professionally** on campus. The CSA has been perceived at times as "divisive," "demanding" and "accusatory," and there seems to be an appetite now for an organizational tone that is more welcoming, affirming and collaborative. There was also encouragement for the CSA leadership to behave as unified ambassadors for a larger shared vision that transcends agendas of personal power.
5. The **governance structure and culture** of the CSA need to support the ongoing implementation of the MVV and equip leaders for success. Numerous governance and operational staffing changes were suggested. Without at least some of these changes being made, the likelihood of any MVV document gaining meaningful traction is low.
6. Opinions on how best to represent CSA **values** were mixed. Lists of values were seen to be of limited use, because they are not understood or lived out consistently in practice. The role of the CSA in promoting the five "I Am a Gryphon" values was unclear. The newly articulated internal service values at the CSA were not developed by or shared with a wider audience. There is also a tension between wanting to promote particular expectations around inclusion and social justice, while feeling uncomfortable about telling people how to think or behave.

Proposed “MVV”: A CSA Identity Statement

In light of the above findings, a renewed CSA Identity Statement is proposed here, comprising a clear articulation of the CSA’s mandate, indicators of success and approach.

The mandate combines both purpose and mission. The indicators of success speak to vision, with a focus on results. The approach underscores values, expressed through behaviour.

It is recommended that the CSA establish measurement systems and annual performance standards for each of the indicators of success, and the approaches where appropriate.

Our Mandate

The CSA is run by students for students. We:

- Represent and amplify the voice of undergraduate students at the University of Guelph, particularly to decision makers;
- Provide practical services that improve students’ lives and save them money;
- Contribute to a positive atmosphere of acceptance, inclusion, belonging and safety on campus;
- Support students to organize around issues they care about, including through clubs and campaigns;
- Organize events that make university life even more fun;
- Create rewarding employment and volunteer opportunities for students as a result of being a student-run organization; and
- Serve as a central coordinating body for undergraduate student association representatives.

Our Indicators of Success

The CSA knows it is doing a great job when:

- Students want to engage with the CSA. They know what the CSA does and are to be involved;
- Executive members represent students accurately and confidently, based on knowledge of what students want that comes from having consulted meaningfully with them;
- The CSA provides services that students use;
- Advocacy on students’ behalf is effective in achieving its goals; and

- The CSA has structures and active processes in place to ensure accountability.

Our Approach

The CSA is committed to:

- Proactive engagement with students;
- Representing all students accurately and effectively;
- Staying relevant and valuable to students;
- Excelling at communication;
- Behaving in a constructive and professional manner;
- Paying attention to the unique history and culture of this university;
- Modelling organizational excellence, including unified leadership and trusted financial management; and
- Promoting acceptance, inclusion, safety and a sense of belonging at the University of Guelph.

Additional Advice

It is common in a project of this nature to receive feedback that goes beyond the original scope of the consultant's mandate but is nevertheless potentially very useful for the organization. Comments of that nature have been summarized here, for future consideration by the leaders of the CSA.

Governance Advice

An Identity Statement is aspirational; it gains traction through behaviour. It needs to be embedded within an effective governance structure, and unified leadership needs to drive its implementation.

Even if an effective governance structure is in place "on paper," it needs to be surrounded by a constructive organizational culture to breathe life into it. In the case of the CSA, pursuing becoming a learning organization with strong accountability and unified collaboration between the Board, Executive and staff will help to make the Identity Statement a closer reflection of real life.

Specific governance-related suggestions were provided throughout the consultations. They included the following:

- A smaller, better trained, accountable and more active Board
- Well run Board meetings with a truly neutral Chairperson who has the support of the members

- Term limits and/or an enforced time gap between being a paid staff member and a Board member
- Non-student seats on Board
- Clearer roles and leadership on the Executive. It is currently unclear, for example, whether the Executive function more like staff (i.e. COO/CFO roles) or like Board Vice Presidents. The distinction is significant, as in the former case they take direction from the Board and in the latter, they give that direction.
- More thorough and systematic knowledge transfer from one year to the next
- Stronger Executive accountability mechanisms, including greater transparency in decision-making. For example, When decisions are taken, greater clarity is needed regarding whose decisions those are – i.e. the Board? Executive? One Executive member?
- Consideration of two-year terms
- Sufficient training/mentoring to ensure Executive members are equipped to carry out their roles effectively, particularly in cases when their experience or skills may not be commensurate with the level of responsibility they carry.
- Annual strategic planning workshops to set priorities, performance targets and plans for the year.

Operational Advice

At an operational level, the CSA is encouraged to consider the following:

- Equip next year's Executive by identifying not only the changes needed, but also a clear path forward for making them.
- Hold clear and realistic expectations of what can reasonably be accomplished within a one-year term. Ongoing operational effectiveness may be sufficient.
- Focus on promoting more effectively what the CSA does/offers and how students can get involved, especially at the first-year level.
- Establish mechanisms and habits that allow the Executive to hear from students on a regular basis.
- Staff should supervise staff, with clear accountability of the General Manager to either the Executive or Board (see above).

Conclusion

The CSA has enormous potential to be a constructive and influential voice at the University of Guelph. Its new proposed Identity Statement has been informed by significant input from a wide range of CSA stakeholders. It is hoped it will serve as an effective tool for multi-year planning and building of positive momentum within the CSA. Its successful implementation is far more likely if accompanied by changes in governance structure and operational practice that undergird its intentions.

Appendices

Appendix A

Research of Comparable Universities

Highlights of how eight other comparably-sized universities define what is important to their Student Association/Union:

- Encourage unity and cooperation; constructive; positive
- Create an atmosphere of acceptance, inclusion, safety
- Promote good conduct
- Advance the interests of its members; results-driven advocacy; on your side; help you navigate; amplify voice; influence things for you
- Involvement and personal development opportunities
- Services
- Diversity, democracy, inclusivity, equal voice – stewards of democracy
- Student engagement; driven by student vision and guidance; understand constituents
- Organizational excellence
- Business innovation; progressive; future oriented
- Strong sense of belonging; build community
- Representation; liaison
- Make student life rewarding and fun
- Professional in our approach; prepared
- Relevant and valuable
- Approachable; visible
- Opportunities for paid and unpaid personal development
- Make decisions within the unique culture of this university
- Adaptable to change
- Socially responsible
- Make student life easier, together
- A buzzing hub
- We help students. We are you/We get you. Cheerleader. We have your back. We're in the game, for you. Invested and useful.
- Listeners. Connectors.

Appendix B

Summary of Feedback from Interviews and Focus Groups

- Need for a clear path forward toward improvement – identify not only the changes needed but also how to make them
 - Can't happen overnight – ideally a multi-year plan with incoming Exec on board
 - Simple, practical victories
- Multi-year commitments within an annual system are difficult, made more so if the organization lacks unity. Generally strong support on current Board/Exec for the need to do so.
 - Some suggestion of 2-year terms on Board and/or Exec
- MVV happens within a context – not just a stand-alone document. Needs leadership to be implemented, a governance structure in which to be embedded etc.
 - A mindset shift to use it
 - Words can be there, but reality has to match
- Want something to guide the platform for income Exec candidates
- Unified leadership within the Executive is key.
 - Accountability as an Executive
 - Priorities should be set as a slate not as individuals
 - Less polarization with staff needed, as a team and as individuals
- Not only about governance structure but also about the culture that surrounds the documents and roles.
 - e.g. Learning organization? Staff as mentors?
 - Craving accountability and clarity
 - CSA could carry a lot of weight if well regarded
- Also about tone
 - Seeking messaging/identity on campus that is less divisive, accusatory, angry, condescending
 - More welcoming, positive, responsive, affirming, energetic
 - CSA often seen as benign, or negative. Need to transform it toward positive, constructive passion.
- Not as fully autonomous as CSA might like to think, for example:
 - Accredits some clubs but not all
 - Relies heavily on the U of G (e.g. space, fee collection etc.)
- Governance ideas:
 - Larger assembly, smaller Board
 - Better trained Board
 - More accountable Board, with positions all filled and attendance strong
 - Well-run Board meetings with truly neutral Chair
 - Less political representation on Board
 - Non-student Directors
 - Elected Chair
 - Term limits, even if still taking an undergraduate course

- Hierarchical structure – or flat with more supports in place
- Run as a slate then hire additional Commissioners
- GM should supervise staff
- Staff could do some of the things that students do here
- Create enforced gap between being Board member and paid staff (1 year?)
- Are Exec more like COO/CFO or more like Board VPs? Is it appropriate that they vote on the Board? Not clear if the GM or the Exec is the ED equivalent. In one case, Exec takes direction from Board and behaves as staff, in the other they are the Board. Varied opinion re: whether GM should be accountable to the Exec or vice versa.
- Training system is “blind leading the blind” or “broken telephone” – need more systematic knowledge transfer
- Greater clarity when things are decisions of the Board (not the Exec or individual members of it)
- Streamline Exec positions
- Current Board composition allows some spots to get ‘stuck’
- Too much unaccountable, variable power in Exec right now
- Two-year terms haven’t worked well in the past (?)
- Clearer accountability – e.g. re: impeachment process
- Accurate job descriptions
- Clear staff roles
- Hired scribe
- Mechanisms to address poor performance
- Level of responsibility not commensurate with experience?
 - Sometimes craving permission, ‘grown up supervision’?
 - Need staff reporting to staff
 - Professionalism, maturity lacking at times
 - “If I’d been interviewed for this role, I would never have been hired.”
- Be careful of comparing directly to other Student Unions. Lots of variability in terms of many factors such as reporting structures, ownership of services, roles etc.
- Student voice is widely agreed to be critical. Need more confidence in the representativeness of that voice. Cannot assume to know what “students” think.
 - Understand what representative governance requires – not about personal voice
 - Better turnout at elections
 - More candidates so that positions are contested
 - More pride in winning a spot if you had to compete for it
 - More mechanisms to elicit input from students
 - More student engagement with those mechanisms
 - Greater accountability to use the mechanisms
 - Can be ‘students for students’ and still give staff a say
 - Need time to engage – capacity, space in schedule
 - Engagement should be a value
 - Transparency around this

- Concerns re keeping in mind who the CSA is for – not about personal power
 - Needs to be “less incestuous” – too much drama
 - Ambassadors of something bigger – not about personal soapbox
 - Tendency to become addicted to the power
- Need multi-year infrastructure and capacity to run businesses/services if they are core
 - Should not be dependent on Exec – should be staff run
 - Student advocacy can ebb and flow but service quality should not
 - Services seen as critically important – invest in them, advertise them, expand them.
- Maintain perspective on what student leaders can do to add value within a single year
 - Bring student perspectives reliably to the table
 - No need to be about personal legacy – keep the machine running
 - Leaders crave making a tangible
 - Work on the same things as each other and make progress from last year rather than infighting and switching direction
- Values
 - Could the CSA position itself to contribute to the Gryphon values? Add value to them, align activity choices around them? Mixed views on the Board about this (see photo) Do they reflect student values more than the CSA currently does?
 - Tricky to have this conversation, as if unified values exist
 - Also have newly minted internal service values
 - Sense that the values vary with the Exec, and they shouldn't.
 - Craving consistency – over time, across campus, in behaviour
 - Tension between not telling people how to think/behave and reinforcing particular expectations (e.g. anti-racism).
- Generally low support on Board for being tied to the CFS/national student movement (although divided – see photo).
- Invest in what is important – including hearing students (e.g. pay for pizza, coffee...)
- Lots of comments re: need for increased CSA visibility so students know what it provides/offers and the impact it has. Communicate about more than just campaigns and events. Average student does not know or care.
- Desire for greater transparency, trust.
- Four prongs to mandate of student voice and student experience:
 - Representation
 - Campaigns
 - Services
 - Events/Activities
- Board (16 responses) sees ideal breakdown of Exec time as follows:
 - Representation – avg 27% of time (ranging from 5-55%, median just above 25)
 - Campaigns – avg 21% of time (ranging from 0 to 55%, median around 22)
 - Services – avg 34% (ranging from 17-50%, median just under 35)

- Events/Activities – 19% of time (ranging from 5 to 50%, median just under 17%)
- Also time needed for general administration
- More comments re: time allocation among mandate priorities
 - Services and representation seen as especially important and less vulnerable to the interests of a changing Executive.
 - Representation and campaigns are seen as linked, but there are diverse views as to how that relationship should play out.
 - Sense that services should run fairly independently of the Executive.
 - Activities/events can likely be run by clubs. Support for concerts, stressbusters plus acknowledgement that clubs don't individually have the budget to host large events. Some feedback that events seem like a waste of money to those who don't choose to participate.
- Indicators of success (what should CSA be good at – from Board – targeted list)
 - Less student apathy. If they want to engage with us, without us needing to be aggressive or militant with them, then we know we are doing a good job on their behalf. They like us and want to be involved.
 - Provide useful services well.
 - Confidence that we are representing students accurately and democratically. We know what they want.
 - Effective advocacy once we know what students want. Voice.
 - Effective communication.
 - Job creation and cost savings
 - Smaller groups get an amplified voice.
 - Coordination among colleges, clubs etc.
- Most needed change (from Board feedback):
 - Multi-year strategic planning/credo on which to base decisions
 - Talk to students more – greater awareness, know what they want
 - Re-evaluate how the CSA is governed and run – clearer roles
 - Ask for opinions more than projecting them – less demanding
 - Support students to organize around issues they care about
 - More physical space
 - More unified Exec and Board
 - Higher trust – internally and with stakeholders
 - Higher profile on campus
 - Well liked
 - Diverse student representation, directly and indirectly

Appendix C

Survey feedback

4,378 responses (17% of all undergraduate students)

93% had heard of the CSA before

Most important roles of the CSA:

- Save students money
- Fight for lower tuition
- Create a culture of acceptance on campus
- Advocate on behalf of students to decision makers
- Provide services for students

Lowest ranking roles:

- Plan events
- Develop student leaders

Most important roles for Exec:

- Engage with students to stay in touch with what they most want
- Represent Gryphons on decision making bodies across campus
- Collaborate with university administration

Least important roles for Exec:

- Run campaigns
- Challenge university administration
- Represent Gryphons to various levels of government

CSA is currently best known for:

- Running social and educational activities (clear winner for both #1 and #2 choice)
- Second place was providing useful services and third was enhancing student experience.
- Lowest ranking options were creating jobs for students and saving students money.

What should CSA be best known for?

- Defending student rights, saving students money and enhancing student experience were close top 3 and clear winners. Providing useful services was fourth option and scored well as second choice.
- Lowest was creating jobs for students.

Awareness of CSA services:

- Highest yes and largest yes/no differential for Safewalk and Transit pass

- Yes exceeded no for each option except Health and Dental plan

Attended a CSA AGM?

- 87% never
- 9% once
- 1% every year

How many times voted?

- 31% never
- 27% once
- 19% twice

7% willing to participate in a 90-minute focus group to provide more detailed feedback.

Did not ask what year in which respondents were currently enrolled.

Roughly 255 respondents wrote useful, specific comments. They were most often about promotion of the CSA to raise awareness; the need for heightened student engagement; a desire for the CSA to save students money; and communicating appropriately with students.

An additional 66 provided comments in the form of encouragement (e.g. “Thanks” or “Good job.”)

Below are examples of some of the comments, sorted into clustered themes:

Promotion: Who you are, what you do, what services you provide

14% of the comments focused on the need for the CSA to do a better job promoting themselves, what they do, the services they offer, and how students can get involved or in touch. Students love the free **events** provided and would like to see more, and suggest the CSA do a better job promoting events and activities. Students also provided suggestions for **new or improved services**. Examples included the following:

- I feel that CSA should advertise more on the services and activities they offer, such as their Sunday Cinema!
- Work on services and improving student experience. Work well with university admin. The campaigns aren't doing anything.
- Provide services for mental health, fight of mental health rights
- The CSA can do a lot better job of promoting the opportunities and what they do for students. I a fourth year accounting student at UofG and the President of the Accounting Society. CSA is personally something I would have loved to get involved with in my first year, but I feel that marketing of the association along with events and their purpose has been weak. I suggest leveraging social media communication channels and attaining ambassadors for the CSA in every big program (e.g.

Commerce, Science, Political Science) etc. This will help to broaden reach and get more people involved in the CSA's events.

- Invest in informing students about your role, it will make people more invested in participating in the CSA and help to improve what you do.
- Would recommend CSA printing hours should be longer
- Get a debit machine at the bullring
- Be better at advertising yourselves and any activities you do put on. There are so many Guelph and university social Media pages and accounts and I rarely see anything about the CSA
- We need better dental and prescription coverage even if it costs a bit more
- I think better promotion of CSA events could go a long way
- Students do not seem to be aware of CSA matters, it might be useful to work on marketing yourselves better, use videos to spread awareness that are entertaining and grab the communities interests do more classrooms presentations etc.
- Please let me opt out of health!! I don't need it!!!!
- You need to do more advertising to make students more aware of your roles on campus and how to become a part of the CSA
- It is better to spend time on services for students rather than trying to decrease tuition because it really isn't unreasonable and services are more likely to be improved.
- I feel like I was never really aware of the organization or how to join it. All they did was fill my email up, but I didn't know how to join or know what they did.
- Make campaigns more well-known among students
- Put out more information on what you guys run and what you are doing and maybe update us!
- I feel that a lot of the information available regarding the CSA isn't necessarily about what they do or have done to help, but rather what they still need to do (ie. fight for lower tuition). Maybe if students had a better understanding of how much the CSA has impacted the UofG culture and system, we would be more open to working more with them.
- I am interested in what CSA does for the university and the initiatives they are taking part in, it would be nice to see more information provided such as at booths set up in the UC courtyard every so often!
- Consider other options for students that commute and the mandatory buss pass fee that ends up being useless for most commuting students(perhaps offer the bus pass fee as a credit toward a parking pass).
- I would appreciate more advertising and information about CSA services like the dental plan and the Bike shop. That being said, thank you for all the hard work you in representing us!
- CSA is great. Sometimes it's hard to keep track of everything they are doing. Maybe a concrete list posted outside CAS office of things currently going on would be helpful! Keep up the good work!
- I like the location of the office, it is well known and visible but maybe have more hours in case of questions/help needed throughout the day or a more publicized phone extension so students may reach CSA with their concerns. Thank you!

- Not sure who to address ideas or issues to or how to get involved
- I like that the office is very well known and easily accessible to students, but maybe have more people present for students who need their help throughout the day, or a more publicized phone extension so students may contact CSA with their questions and concerns. I think this will help students commuting from Mississauga and Toronto in regards to voicing concerns or getting involved with CSA more. Thank you!

Student engagement

9% of the comments suggested the CSA needs to have a better presence on campus and do a better job listening to and engaging with students. For instance:

- I think there should be more campaigns geared to words making students more heard.
- Listen to marginalized groups on campus
- I think getting out to hear more about what is concerning students is extremely important.
- Though I'm not sure how one would go about it, you should try to reach out more to first year students because as a first year student myself I feel very distant from the CSA, what its goals are, what it does, etc. Therefore even asking us to vote, as first year students, we would not make an educated election.
- The CSA feels very dislocated from the student body this year. They don't seem as involved or encouraging for participation from students.
- Get more involved with the student body, stop acting out of your own whims.
- CSA is not engaging enough. Frankly, most people are not concerned with what happens within the CSA because they are known for being controversial with little actual change occurring. You need to collaborate more with students and LISTEN rather than just trying to make noise.
- There should be more outreach with students to find out what we want
- Get students opinions on concerning issues
- Focus less on campaigning and attacking people on Facebook, and more on trying to include students in administrative issues at the university. Relax about informing others of your position of potential power, and use that power to get in touch with and help students, as should be your job.
- Introducing CSA during class time would be a great way to remind students about the offerings of CSA
- I feel like I don't see or hear about the CSA doing anything other than social events like the concerts or movies or running the Bullring. To have more of an impact and presence on campus, the CSA could see what matters most to students, advocate for things that are important to us like lowering fees and actually seeing results. So far, it doesn't look like there's been much positive change since I've been at Guelph. And yes, don't get me wrong, social events are important to community and student culture but the events that are run are not the only important thing to students and it's not something that everyone can or will take part in.

Save students money

9% provided comments related to money. Most of these comments wanted the CSA to help students save money, lower tuition and other fees, etc. There were a few comments that the CSA should stop trying to lower tuition. Here are some examples:

- Just save us money and provide good services. Spare all the bullshit (events, advocacy, etc.) Do things that will have a concrete impact.
- I think the members of CSA that have money in their budget need to give it to organizations that need the money. For example, how about give money to campaign for students, because EVERY students' voice needs to be heard. It's not fair if only the privileged organizations are heard. Give to the under budgeted. If any organization asks for funding and you have the money, it's your right to support that and not be greedy. I'm not saying everyone is, but the CSA should build everyone up. Thanks.
- Don't waste time or money on advocating for lower tuition. It will take more than CSA to do that.
- CSA should let students choose where they want to direct their tuition money. ex. 100% of additional fees to food bank.
- Fighting for lower tuition is great, but so is letting students know of all the great things their tuition dollars entitle them to and where exactly their money is going
- Fight to lower student fees! That is by far the most important fight for students that want an education.
- We already have rights just fight for better education and cheaper school
- We need less tuition fees, maybe more job fairs?
- Fight the fees! Free education now!
- The irony is that the CSA stands for saving students money, fighting for lower tuition and providing services, however, in doing so, CSA fees cost students. All of the clubs, organizations and activists groups (none of which I am a part of) are all on my tuition and costing me money. Instead of cheaper tuition provide students with the option of what services they want to be a part of and buy into.

Communication with students

4% of comments focused on communication with students and provided ideas and suggestions for improvements as follows:

- Send us more emails to keep us updated.
- Send fewer emails
- Take very long when it comes to responding to emails & SRM
- Your emails seem to be a bit overwhelming and it can be easy to miss a very important topic. Please emphasis in the subject line important votes etc.
- Better exposure for when events/meetings happen would be helpful.
- Develop new ways to reach out to students, emails are often ignored by campus members
- Send out more concise emails about what the CSA is doing to improve student life on campus. They are very long-winded and I feel many students may regard them as spam when they actually contain really important information, it's just that students don't

- have the time to read through text-heavy emails. The CSA should also promote themselves more -- they do such great things for students on campus and I feel as though half the student population doesn't acknowledge them at all or even know what they do.
- A lot of times events are going on in the University Centre that a lot of students don't hear about. It would be nice for students to hear about those events through some form of communication.
 - In your emails about voting, put the main questions and issues in the email tag.
 - Many students do not vote in the CSA elections because they think the email is just another weekly update or spam. I think better advertising for this is needed.
 - There needs to be a better social media presence or better ways of communicating with students. Especially with regards to elections.
 - Have a website with a calendar so you can see all the events and click on them to find out more
 - Important issues such as the bus pass referendum and the food bank should not be hidden in the emails regarding less important issues, they should be boldly called out with the consequences of each vote clearly stated for student to know.

Student advocate

4% feel that the CSA needs to do a better job fighting for student rights and representing students. Some of those comments are shown here:

- CSA is an autonomous union that needs to fight for students. But your website, this year, says otherwise. The CSA has been taken over by right wing careerists who just want to further their careers. This is bad.
- I hear lots of negative things about my own demographic (straight white males) around campus from social justice groups. What will the CSA do to encourage true equality instead of allowing for a social teeter-totter effect, by attempting to raise one group's rights by lowering another's?
- Challenge the institution, do not take your elected positions for granted! The students need you to be our voice!
- Instead of only protesting and challenging the administration, you should be more negotiative and compromising to make real changes in a collaborative way!
- Protect students' rights
- The CSA needs to support students and their campaigns that are run by students. The CSA should speak on behalf of the students; not administration.
- I believe that all students on campus should be aware that the CSA is an advocate for their rights. Most students, especially international students don't get their voice heard or aren't aware of the support of the CSA
- A lot of talk that I hear from my fellow students is that the CSA is truly a useless organization. They continue to advocate for cheaper tuition but nothing is done. They do not advertise their campaigns well and I have heard that some members are not effective in their roles. I would like to see the CSA become an organization that students are proud of.
- The CSA is something that bewilders me as an International Development student. I

do not understand how it believes it represents the diversity of students that it says it does. Personally, I lost all respect for the CSA a few years ago when the lead a BOG campaign, where they 'delayed' a BOG meeting by pounding on desks. What bothered me most about the campaign was the use of a Gorilla, wearing a suit and tie, stomping on students holding protests signs. The reason it bothered me is that while they say they promote decolonization and educational workshops on racism, members of the BOG that year were people of colour, and angry Gorillas have been a terribly racist and colonialist stereotyped perpetuated towards POCs, specifically of African Descent (which a female BOG member was). I am certainly not perfect in my views, and I myself constantly check my privilege and learn from it, but I could no longer support an organization that would work on decolonization and anti-racism efforts within the student body, but then perpetuate that towards BOG members. Writing this makes me feel the anger I did then, but I knew, based off of being friends with CSA members, that the feedback would go nowhere. I stopped voting for the CSA after that campaign, and advocated for others to do the same. I am grateful this survey has been handed out so I can finally, anonymously, voice this concern. I hope to come back to complete my graduate degree at UOG, and I recognize then I'll be represented by the GSA. However, I continuously plan to advocate for students to challenge the CSA, and really critically analyze its merit for defending students. Thank you for giving me the space to say this.

- The CSA should work with the school and run services for us, that is all. You're a union, not a social justice group for the University. Represent me to the university.
- The CSA needs to continue representing the interests of students, and includes advocating for students on issues such as tuition fees. The fact that the CSA excluded students participating in the Day of Action from the recent Town Hall was a reflection of the exec's lack of concern for these responsibilities
- Since the CSA is elected by the students, the elected students should act to benefit the students, not administration.
- I would like to see improvement in helping and advocating for students with disabilities.
- There should be better efforts to defend student rights. Last year I inquired to file a complaint with someone about how I had been disrespected on campus, and because they were too busy with the bus referendum, my complaint was not further looked into.
- Be autonomous from the university administration and think about how your decisions affect minorities.

Other

The remaining feedback includes many one-off comments and suggestions. There are a few topics that several students raised (1-2% of comments per topic), including the CSA needing to **improve its image, stay out of politics, support student clubs and protect club space** and **make improvements to the bus pass/transit service.**

Specific Student Requests

Within the 4,378 survey responses, students made specific service-related requests and/or offered concrete ideas for service improvements that are captured here

- Longer printing hours
- ATM at the Bullring
- Lower food prices :)
- Choice between bus pass or parking credit for commuting students
- Better health/dental plan even if it costs a bit more, with better options to opt out
- More targeted outreach to first year students so they can get involved and be more informed in their voting
- Overwhelmed my emails – hard to tell which ones are especially important – often ignored
- Calendar of events
- More support for students with disabilities and/or struggling with mental health challenges
- Protect club space
- Invest in what is important – including hearing students (e.g. pay for pizza, coffee...)
- Have more hours in case of questions/help needed throughout the day
- Publicized phone extension so students may reach CSA with their concerns
- You should put signs up at the bike racks around campus for the bike centre so people know about it!
- Make the website more user friendly. It is almost impossible to find anything on there that you aren't promoting. Like finding last years minutes is almost impossible to do. Please fix this.