VUSAC Meeting Agenda

**Call to order:** 5:35 pm EST, November 18, 2022

**Land Acknowledgement:**

*Emilie*

*We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.*

**Official Regrets:** Vincent Espenida

**Absent:** Charlie Sun

**Approval of minutes:**

*Motion by Michael Elsaesser to approve the minutes for November 4th, Seconded by Diana Vink*

*All in favour. None opposed. None abstaining. Motion passes.*

**Additions to the agenda:**

**Approval of the agenda:**

*Motion by Jackson Leslie to approve the agenda for November 18, Seconded by Dhir Shah*

*All in favour. None opposed. None abstaining. Motion passes.*

EX-OFFICIO REPORTS:

*Motion: Shane Joy motions to grant Ali Kehl speaking rights, seconded by Michael Elsaesser*

*All in favour. None opposed. None abstaining. Motion passes.*

Ali: Hopefully you all had a good reading week, and I hope you got some rest if you were working during that week. There’s a lot of VUSAC events coming up. Caucus is coming up next Friday, and then the December 6th memorial is also in the works. Thank you to everyone who volunteered and is supporting us for the event. Our TM programming is coming to an end with a self-care fair. Don’t worry if you’re not a first year or transfer student, just come out, we’ll have really good grab bags. Burwash Study Space is opening and is back from hiatus, December 9-19th. VUSAC Members have the opportunity to do shifts. On November 21st at 9:30 a link will be sent out with the sign-up. Lastly, please remember to take care of yourselves and be kind to one another.

ACTION ITEMS:

*Motion: Sooyeon Lee to approve an addition to the President budget (Appendix A), seconded by Jackson Leslie (5 minutes)*

Sooyeon: We’re running low on stamps and we need that to pay our printer, and binders to organize our cheques.

Thomas: It’s just $30.

*All in favour. None opposed. None abstaining. Motion passes.*

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

*Caucus discussion items, put forth by Shane Joy (10 minutes)*

Shane: I’ve probably spoken to some of you about this already. Caucus is November 25, from 5:30-8:30. Constitutionally, you’re all required to be there, but just let me know if you can’t make it, as I am chair for the meeting. At the beginning, there will be reports from each administrative office at Vic. After that three will be Q&A, which is a good opportunity to hold them accountable to their actions and goals. Following that, there will be discussion items pertaining to VUSAC and Vic that anyone can propose. What I wanted this discussion item to be is if anyone had any discussion item, or proposal, or if you want to talk about questions you’re seeking to ask, or you could fill out the form. If there are any discussion items anyone wants, just let me know and I can add it to the agenda.

Amy: If we’re going to talk about divestment, I think the goal is to remind them that we’re paying attention so they continue to feel pressured because students are going to be reacting. We’re going to wear orange since orange is the divestment color, and we want to show them that we want to divest, so if you could wear orange, please do that! I also have a suggestion, we should ask about hiring at Burwash because they seem to be outsourcing all of the positions

Zoe: So all four people that are going to be on Caucus are the people who vote on this cause they’re on the BoR, so this is a good place to bring that up. They haven’t hired new union jobs in a while.

Sooyeon: Can we talk about the exchange of start date, I think that would be pretty relevant.

Shane: So I’ll just note the other items I had lined up Stevenson House, student specifically within Goldring and their hours, potentially David Gilmour, the potential international commission, accountability with signing authority and making sure that the process is smoother moving forward, building on the BIPOC award and Indigenous Student Admissions, and anything to do with admissions and what they’re doing in regards to post-COVID.

Rebecca: I’d like to discuss the oil well, I’d like to figure out what Vic’s plans are to do with it, and what they’re using the money for. I also want to ask for transparency in sustainability policy. Vic only publishes a few paragraphs in their report, and I want them to have specific goals. There’s a lot of inconsistency in compost and their recycling system it differs in different spaces at Vic.

Zoe: I want to talk about Stevenson House, and I wanted to talk to President Esterhammer about that. Kelley Castle was there when Stevenson House was shut down. There was a blog about it by students, and from that alone it was clear she was involved in that. The plan was that Stevenson House was going to live in the RJ Mansion, but that didn’t happen. I was going to ask her about that, and what’s everyone’s thoughts on that.

Rebecca: We should be bringing that up, and what the prospects in the future are for cooperative housing.

Shane: This is more of a general thing, but I think for Caucus to be productive, I’m going to be emailing the administrators with what the agenda is so that they can expect what’s to come. I just wanted to say that it might be better in some instances to schedule meetings with them in those cases. It might end up being an unproductive use of the time, so I would say to take a more diplomatic approach.

*Motion by Shane Joy to the discussion item by ten minutes, Seconded by Sooyeon Lee.*

*All in favour. None opposed. None abstaining. Motion passes.*

Diana: I’m considering adding it as a discussion item, in providing affordable housing. In Innis, students didn’t have affordable residence over the Winter Holidays and ended up living unsafely or being homeless. I wanted to bring it up to admin to see if they had any resolutions, and there are questions and concerns with Chelsea cause it’s still expensive.

Julie: Could someone provide me context on Stevenson House?

Zoe: So in 1939, Stevenson donated land for cooperative affordable housing. If Vic tried to shut it down, they would open new affordable housing. It was supposed to be moved into RJ Mansion, the whole point was for cooperative housing, but the mansion is just another residence option.

Amy: Isn’t that illegal, can’t we just file a lawsuit?

Tariq: So the administration had reasons for shutting it down. I also think that when we’re talking to admin, we should try to have a constructive discussion, especially with Stevenson House. If we’re going to present this, it should be presented so that it’s a discussion.

Sooyeon: I think we should have strategy while to the members of administration, because their perspective is having a responsibility to the university. What they’re looking at is less of if students want something, but taking an angle about what’s beneficial to the university in the long run. I think people need to start thinking about that, because they need to consider the university’s perspective.

Zoe: The path for the lawsuit has been done but I can’t update on that.

Shane: There’s a form for submissions of discussion items. It’s totally fine to just go on the form and ask anonymously, so if you’re concerned about protecting your identity, then you can do that.

Tariq: So Diana brought up housing, did they expand on that in the email?

Diana: So I have a meeting with Shiny from the DO, but based on the email, I don’t think she understood that I wanted to discuss.

Tariq: There should be one option allowing us to stay in residence or match residence price-wise.

Shane: Chelsea Hotel is typically offered at $120, and the breakdown how much a student pays for residence is $50 per night on residence.

Diana: So the rate they’re offering is $129 for December 21-January 7. That doesn’t include the food, but they offer 20% discount on the food at Chelsea. But students-in-residence already pay a meal plan. It’s a place for them to live but the logistics of it can be really challenging. They also say that there’s scholarships available if you have concerns about financial aid. But, the UofT grant application portal is another step. Overall, it’s an option and I appreciate that, but it’s one I think is going to be inaccessible.

Jackie: So, I'm staying in Chelsea, December 21-January7 for the winter break due to the expensive, unaffordable flight cost to go back home. The price including tax is over $2,700, so plus food is $3,000. I'm an International Student, so I already pay a lot, yet I find it unaffordable. It obviously will be more pressuring for the students on scholarships.

*Motion by Shane Joy to extend the discussion item by ten minutes, Seconded by Michael Elsaesser.*

*All in favour. None opposed. None abstaining. Motion passes.*

Rebecca: Just doing some quick math, how much I paid per day for Marg Ad without food is about $40 per day, roughly eighteen days and that’s only $712. The two thousand dollars difference is pretty significant.

Michael: On the issue of housing at Winter Break, other colleges are allowing their students to stay in residence.

Zoe: I’m pretty sure dons are allowed to stay too.

Diana: Callan was talking me through this, and dons are allowed to stay because they are less liable because they’re are technically employed by the college, and there’s a lot of legal jargon so that college isn’t responsible for them. Whereas if students were staying on residence, they would need to hire staff. The Innis Herald released an article from the year before last, the university provided stay at CampusOne for $300. And sometimes it’s not just a financial concern, it could be a safety concern to returning home.

Shane: I think this conversation is great but let’s save it for Caucus. We should also be thinking about what VUSAC could be doing for these topics.

Cameron: We tried this last year, because there was nowhere for people to go. Many of the interactions with admin didn’t go anywhere. In addition to thinking of getting them to move, maybe we could set people up with roommates to find an Airbnb. The second thing for Caucus is COVID. I personally find the changed policies with masking and vaccination concerning because there have been issues with sickness, but I don’t know how other people feel about this.

Shane: I think you should discuss it anyways even if it’s just your opinion.

Cameron: I totally agree, but I want admin to takeaway the point is that some people have feelings about that.

Amy: I think in regards to paying to stay for winter break, can we do a thing where people who are comfortable to have someone stay at their place can?

*Home for the Holidays, put forth by Maarib Kirmani Haseeb (3 minutes)*

Maarib: Home for the Holidays is next Thursday from 5-8pm at Alumni Hall in Old Vic! It’s six days away. Thank you to all the VUSAC members who are volunteering on that night. But tell people!

Emilie: Please respond to my email! If you don’t have a booth idea but agreed to sign up for one please reply, if you don’t, I will reach out and assign you a booth.

*Semi Formal theme ideas, put forth by Ninon Crestois (10 minutes)*

Ninon: So this is just to get thoughts and see how people feel about the themes. The first is Yule Ball, I know there are Harry Potter connotations related but it’s more for inspiration. There’s White Christmas/Winter Holiday type of thing, which makes the most sense. It’s also one of the cheaper ones to decorate, we can just spray paint some branches, which is free. There’s also Enchanted Forest, and Bejeweled.

Shane: I like the first one, but I think you should take out the Christmas references, and make it Winter themed in general.

Zoe: I like Enchanted Forest.

Diana: In terms of equity, I think Harry Potter is fine, we should be more worried about the Christmas aspect than anything.

Shane: The Yule Ball is a Christmas celebration, so yeah.

Sooyeon: I think the first is more appropriate. But Enchanted Forest is cool, so maybe you could save that for semi-formal.

Luca: We could call it mid-winter ball, that keeps it equitable and fancy.

Sooyeon: What about winter solstice?

Diana: That might have some religious connotations with Paganism.

Carolyn: Yule Ball would be easier to do because there are decorations at Dollarama available.

Amy: I feel like it’s more of an issue with religious practices like Christmas, something with paganism might be fine.

Cameron: Winter solstice is also December 21st.

Luca: The High Ball is planned for January 21st.

Diana: Maybe simpler is better.

Lara: I can help with theme titles after the meeting!

*Student mental health, put forth by Sooyeon Lee (10 minutes)*

Sooyeon: I wanted to generally bring up the discussion of student mental health. I’m finding that a lot of people are finding this semester more difficult than usual. Freshmen in university may feel that resources are out of reach. And I know that we can’t create resources, but we can make them more accessible. On the VUSAC website, there’s a mental health resource document created by the Mental Wellness Commission. I think we should do our part, and make it so that they accessing these resources are easier and people know they exist. Especially as we’re ramping up final season, what can we do as VUSAC to help with these difficult times.

Shane: The last time we updated it was 2020, it’s been almost three years. There are also people at UofT that have jobs referring people to mental health resources. It would be great if we could centralize that. Maybe we could discuss this at caucus with other members of the Vic community.

Jackie: It was last updated in November 2020 and it hasn’t been touched since then,

Rebecca: I understand we should be directing people to resources but I do think there are some circumstances where some people might not be comfortable with them. I think we should do our work to have our own set of resources.

Shane: That's not what i meant, I meant people have those jobs redirecting, but we could do a better job.

Michael: I think some people aren’t comfortable with UofT resources, so we should add resources outside of UofT to our list. We should have more proactive methods as a council to try to get ahead of the issue and make students feels supported before they start feeling down.

Diana: We’re doing resource sets on the Equity Team, so a volunteer is taking in resources and compiling them into any list. We’re looking at other topics and compiling resources for those as well.

Julie: One of the things I wanted to do was a flowchart of sorts, so they also know what to expect. It would also be good to redirect students depending in what they needed. There’s something great about it coming from a peer rather than a university standpoint. I think we should compile our efforts so we don’t get drained finding the same resources.

Luca: I’m employed by the university as a TM, and people usually feel too intimidated to ask for support. I agree with the fact we need to amalgamate our efforts. I also think that a document can be intuitive, but we should make the information on the website searchable. And everyone’s heard of Navi, but it’s kind of useless. If we can create some sort of tool as well, to lessen the surprise people have when they want to access support.

Shane: I wanted to talk about the fact that there’s two commissions planning to work on this, so maybe this could be something that Soo can coordinate. And to what Luca was saying, I think it’s a bit complicated to make a tool.

Luca: It’s not perfect, but it’s something we can easily do with our time together as council.

*Motion by Zoe Lazaris to extend the discussion item by ten minutes, Seconded by Tariq Harney*

*All in favour. None opposed. None abstaining. Motion passes.*

Shane: I think creating a document that tell people what to expect is sort of proportionate.

Diana: I have a question for Jackie. We don’t have a search bar on the website. Is it hard to set that up?

Jackie: I can look into that and get back to you.

Luca: We should make the document searchable, where someone can type in what they need. When you’re in a time of crisis, it’s hard to navigate a resource like the website. I think we should improve the SEO of the mental health document.

Jackie: In terms of the search bar, it’s not that difficult, and I can work on that. The SEO issue, I’d have to discuss that with other people.

Shane: I might have misinterpreted your suggestion, Luca, I think the search bar would be great.

Tariq: I think we brought this up in training, in terms of resources, what are our capacities and how are we qualified as a council to do that?

Diana: I don’t think we’re talking about being the resources. We as a council can make the resources available with things like SEO, keywords on certain subpages, which I think is how search engines work.

Jackie: I’ll look into that.

Zoe: There was a report at central UofT about responses to crisis and how it’s Campus Police responding, which can be problematic for people with historically bad experiences with law enforcement. I think we also need to do advocacy work, we need a response to mental health crisis that aren’t cops.

Rebecca: This is why people mistrust the university system in the first place. In a state of crisis you want empathy, and in many circumstances you’re just sent up the chain of command. There should be resources for specific marginalized groups like BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities. There should also be links to resources outside of UofT.

Zoe: A lot of stuff in mental health feel like a band aid. People might also not trust those in student unions. There’s a lot of fear rooted in that, and we need to do more advocacy work as an administration.

Shane: What I think Rebecca and Zoe are getting at are really important. I think that the fear is our responsibility as well as others’ to remedy. What also happens is that you speak to someone, they say it’s bad, and you end up not going to that resource.

*Motion by Diana Vink to extend the discussion item by five minutes, Seconded by Sooyeon Lee.*

*All in favour. None opposed. None abstaining. Motion passes.*

Lara: Personally speaking, I wanted to access therapy in my first year but I was so overwhelmed with the amount of resources that I put it off. And in second year, what ended up happening was my colleague gave me the link directly, and that pushed me to access it. In terms of resources, I agree with Julie in terms of a support flowchart, so that it gets more specific to what they need to access. And in terms of advocacy work, we need to put forward the identity that we’re also students and experience the same things that they do. I think that things like the Instagram takeover is a great opportunity to make that clear. Lastly, I think we should work with existing mental health associations for resources and to make sure we’re not stepping on each other’s toes.

Rebecca: I think that giving people a good idea of what to expect is important and it can help manage expectations. There are very different levels of these things and communicating that is important.

Luca: We can simplify it down to a sort of quiz, instead of a long piece of paper. We could get a committee to come up with a few key questions, that way you’re answering yes or no questions to get down to the source they need.

Shane: I think we should also loop in the dons and the Dean’s Office and see how they can help you. We should also clarify what happens in situations like these with the dons, so it’s clear.

*Motion by Zoe Lazaris to extend the discussion item by five minutes, Seconded by Julie Seeger*

*All in favor. None opposed. None abstaining. Motion passes.*

Amy: I think advocacy is important but we shouldn’t get too many people involved because that might deter others to accessing the resources.

Maarib: A lot of what I wanted to say has already been said. A massive document can be overwhelming, I think we should have an FAQ or post that students can refer to. I think the flowchart idea we shouldn’t do because that’s what Navi does. Instead answer direct questions like how do I get a therapist, how do I get a diagnosis, etc. I also want to echo Lara’s thought on VUSAC members’ mental health campaign, and if people are comfortable sharing their experience accessing support then that would be great. It’s a really big problem with expectations, like what happens when they access the resource. We should also clarify things like what the Dean’s Office does, what Health & Wellness does, etc. I think if we want to access how students are feeling right now, we should have a form out asking things like if they’ve accessed mental health resources, so we’re not just making generalizations based on our experiences. Shane brought up bringing this at Caucus, and I think it’s important to ask admin these questions.

Luca: The first way to access help is traditionally like you seek out help, or you can get a referral from an academic advisor. From an equity standpoint it’s kind of strange because that’s not widely known. I also like the idea of an Instagram campaign in terms of FAQ with mental health. We could also collaborate with @viccollegelife and the Dean’s Office.

Rebecca: In terms of getting a referral, we can advocate for this to be put on the website, there should be more communication on that. I think that the website is really annoying to navigate, and we can do advocacy for that to be changed. The phone of Health & Wellness is only open during 9-5 so those who can’t call in because of work have to go out of their way to call in.

*Anti-Asian Racism Working Group (AARWG), put forth by Sooyeon Lee (5 minutes)*

Sooyeon: So a fourth year involved in the Anti-Asian Racism Working Group sent me an email, so I’ll just read. The AARWG is a body that reviews institutional practices and makes recommendations. They’re inviting university members to speak up or discuss their concerns, and wanted to invite a bunch of VUSAC members to attend. I’d like to ask if anyone here is interested in attending.

Shane: I think you should send out an email too.

Diana: We should also be given the registration link so you could also that.

Sooyeon: I’ll share the Focus Group announcement so it can be posted on our Instagram. They have a bunch of different dates and times, but I’ll also send it in an email.

*VEFS budget request (Appendix A), put forth by Thomas Keough (15 minutes)*

Thomas: So the Victoria College Helpers matter was finally resolved. This is VEFS, which were ratified in October. Their budget is a bit scary, and the first line says that they have 8-10 designers who are each given $150. This is probably not feasible for us to fund, so they’ve been informed of other methods of funding. The second line of funding is what they’ve already spent, the $158. This would be a decent chunk out of the remaining budget for the term, but because we’re not getting any other budget requests, I don’t think it’d be too bad.

Michael: I don’t mind dipping into the VPSO contingency fund for this matter.

Shane: We shouldn’t allow them to spend before ratification. I understand that there’s a contingency fund but this is why we have budgeting periods.

Micahel: So Kate was going to ratify them, so I was elected thinking they were already ratified, when they weren’t. Also, the VPSO contingency fund is renewed every semester, and I haven’t received any requests thus far.

Shane: I didn’t know that they were a late ratification. I think Student Projects also has lots of money, so that request can go through them.

Jackson: My concern is more of retroactively paying for this. I know there was an issue with their ratification, but why wasn’t there a budget submitted. It’s poor protocol and they can't just assume they'll always get the money. I think the contingency fund might be better. Also, if you know what was usually spent in previous years pre-COVID. Last year, they got an excessive amount of money, and given that it was COVID it was fine, but I’d like to see previous years before that. And, if there are 8-10 designers why did they budget for fifteen?

Michael: I’m not sure what they knew, but by the 27th they already knew they weren’t ratified. I just think they assumed that because VEFS was longstanding, they just went ahead.

Shane: They should not have done that. I also think it’s 8-10 designers per designer group.

Diana: I will say, I also thought they were ratified already, and I remember them planning this introductory event. So I’m not that worried about the money, but we should emphasize that they shouldn’t do it again. The $150 is not enough money though, according to my friend who is a designer with VEFS.

Shane: I believe we should remain consistent with things that not have been requested. I don’t think the orgnization should assume that we would give them the money. They could go and ask a larger amount of money from Student Projects.

Michael: We have retroactively funded things in the past, and if we made exceptions then, I don’t see why we can’t make an exception now.

Lara: I agree with Jackson that they should have submitted a budget request prior, but you did explain Michael, why they couldn’t do that, but there are some of these items in the VUSAC office, which would have brought their spending down. I think that if you were to dip into the contingency fund it would only be for the second line, and we should redirect them to Student Projects for the first line.

Sooyeon: Typically what a VPSO contingency fund is used for is for when people forget to include tax and dollar conversion in their calculations, it’s not for additional line items.

Michael: I would not want to fund the first line, I did tell them to go to student projects.

Rebecca: My friend is the finance chair for Student Projets and they have 90,000. They are willing to spend that money, so it’s almost guaranteed to be given.

Diana: While I do agree that we need to hold people accountable, we as an organization don’t want that burden to fall on students. It’s not making a difference where they get the money. My personal opinion would be to give them the money they spent, but we also need to give them the warning that we’re doing this for you now because of the miscommunication. Simply make it clear that this is an extreme circumstance, that there was just something that went wrong, and we’re only doing this once and not again.

Shane: I think we have a way to avoid the money being put on students, which is through budgeting periods, and I think that this was because we had troubles ratifying them as a club. I just think that who’s to say the other clubs wont start expecting this for themselves. We have a controlled process that works for us and I dont think it’s one we should just violate. Just putting it in an email doesn't fix anything because next year council would have to deal with it too.

*Motion by Diana Vink to extend the discussion item by five minutes, Seconded by Sooyeon Lee*

*All in favor. None opposed. None abstaining. Motion passes.*

Michael: I don’t think you should assume that students are trying to take advantage of VUSAC’s money. I think that in this specific instance, VUSAC did drop the ball.

Sooyeon: VEFS wasn’t on that email that Kate sent out, so what are you referring to when you say that VUSAC dropped the ball?

Michael: Kate had emailed VEFS that she would bring them forward for ratification on September 30th, but that did not happen.

Shane: I wasn’t trying to say that.

Jackson: To clarify, we don't want the financial burden to fall on students. I personally think it should come out of the contingency funding and I understand that it’s a budget item, but they had an event and spent the money. I think this should come out of the contingency fund, and that might not be the best protocol. We also had a second round of budget ratification on October 14 that wasn’t brought up. I understand there was a communication issue but this falls more on them than us.

Thomas: So they weren’t able to attend budget ratification because they weren’t on the contact list that I used because they weren’t ratified. I also think that if we’re retroactively funding this it might be a good idea to postpone it because we don’t have any receipts.

COMMISSION REPORTS:

*Mental Wellness: Julie & Vincent (5 mins)*

Julie: I’m sure all of you know, as a commission we’re revisiting everything we wanted to do in September. As Vincent wrote in his semiannual report, we have a biweekly wellness tea, but no one really comes to them. We want to collaborate with other commissions. And next semester, I personally want to look into the research aspect, so I want to conduct a survey and if you have any ideas for what to put in that survey please let me know. For the compilation of resources, we should collaborate so it’s a smart use of our efforts. VUSAC as a council we should talk about what we can do as a student union. A lot of students can go throughout their university and not interact with us. I also want TAs and and Professors to undergo mental health training, since they’re the first stop in a student’s university experience and provide academic support. Professors are protected by things like tenureship, so it’s difficult for them to have accountability.

EXECUTIVE REPORTS:

*President: Sooyeon (3 minutes)*

Sooyeon: The AARWG just got back to me, so I’ll send out the email soon. For the mental health initiative, it boils down to advocacy and the resources. We should do our due diligence as a council, can I see a quick show of hands of who’s interested to work on that? I’ll send an email regarding it. I’ve been working on the space audit with Caitriona, and the most important aspect we found out was that the Copper Room, Music Room, and Wymilwood are the most booked. The Copper Room and Wymilwood are popular because of AV, so maybe that's something we can do more thinking about. Goldring events are usually organized for student and by students, so the VSEF handles all of the room booking, except for the Regents Room, which is done through Events Victoria. We were also talking about meeting and study spaces being a mix and having a balance of both. Finally, the takeover starts this Monday, so can I quickly pick five random people who would want to start their takeover, so that Jackie and I can give the login.

*Motion: Jackson Leslie motions to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Shane Joy*

*All in favour. None opposed. None abstaining. Motion passes.*

*Meeting adjourned at 7:22 PM.*