

OPEN LETTER

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Alan Ehrenholz
President, University of British Columbia AMS

Oki Napi:

RE: Indigenous Committee within the AMS

This in response to your email regarding the formation of an Indigenous Student Committee with the AMS. In your email response to the above committee formation your response was, “Thank you for sending along your thoughts about this Committee. I have sent this email to Max Holmes, our new VP Academic and University Affairs.” With all due respect, I was expecting one of two things; a more in-depth email in which you were concerned about non-existent Indigenous presence within the AMS, or a plan of action that demonstrates the AMS has something in place. Also, I already sent the VP Academic, Mr. Holmes, information of the same sort.

In my 4 years at the University of British Columbia, I have learned about my own history as an Indigenous person. I have witnessed the AMS address issues that affected me as a student, but in an un-holistic manner. My past 15 years of work, social justice, and governance experience have prompted me to speak to the need for an Indigenous Committee within the AMS, as the formation of one is long overdue.

I feel that it is time for the AMS to immediately start work on an Indigenous committee for the following reasons:

1. **Inclusion with Indigenous Perspectives:** At the recent debate for the VP Academic I was witness to a sight that has been going on for the past 150 years - Non-Indigenous people arguing about Indigenous issues without our input in the debate. I actually felt a pain in my heart witnessing each candidate debate issues that have direct effect on all Indigenous students at UBC. Politicians thinking they are doing good by “discussing” and “arguing” an issue, but never letting Indigenous people in on the dialogue.
2. **Sensitivity Training:** Also at the Debate one candidate used the words “privilege” and “sexual assault” in one sentence, I did not realize at the time I was triggered by the way they were discussing sexual assault.
3. **Indigenous Engagement:** Since my time at UBC I have been hearing academics, professors, employees, students and committee members address the issue of engagement. There would be more indigenous students involved if there were more Indigenous students enrolled at UBC - FIX THIS PROBLEM as well.
4. **Leadership Skills:** In four years since being at UBC, I have seen many non-Indigenous people in roles of Leadership within the AMS. There is a position within the AMS that are Indigenous specific, I feel with no disrespect, it is a lot of work for one person. Why not have a separate committee to contribute and advise on the issues that the individual is performing? This is for Indigenous students to gain the same knowledge and skills that their counterparts receive. Limited to one or

two people, excludes Indigenous students from gaining experience in elected leadership roles within the present AMS structure.

5. **Indigenous Involvement:** I researched Canadian Universities that have Indigenous Involvement within student union structures. The information below is taken from QSTopUniversities.com, where they have listed the top Universities in 2016/17 (<https://www.topuniversities.com/>):
 - a. The University of Toronto: Within the University of Toronto's student governance structure a Social Justice and Equity Commission which includes the Indigenous Sub-Commission. <https://www.utsu.ca/commissions/>
 - b. McGill University: Within McGill's student structure there are actually 2 committees. Under Joint Board-Senate Committee On Equity, a sub committee on Indigenous Peoples. The second is Indigenous Affairs Working Group. <http://ssmu.mcgill.ca/ua/university/committees/>
 - c. University of Alberta: Within UofA's student governance structure exists the Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Ad Hoc Committee <https://www.su.ualberta.ca/governance/committees/>

Only 3 of the top 10 universities have an Indigenous committee, although some do have Indigenous clubs. Upon further research I have found that there should be Indigenous Committee's at the national level as well.

6. **Issues for the committee:** There are many issues that the committee could work on and here are a few suggestions. Indigenous performers at Alma Mater events, Indigenous admissions process, Indigenous housing, post-secondary funding that has not changed for the past 30 years.
7. **Vancouver as the City of Reconciliation:** As part of Vancouver's designation as a city of Reconciliation, whose vision includes "Incorporate a First Nations and urban Aboriginal perspective into our work and decisions" <http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/city-of-reconciliation.aspx>. The University of British Columbia's Student Union would be contributing to a vision that goes beyond its walls.

As mentioned before I am aware that within the AMS there is an Indigenous specific position; the Indigenous Students' Commissioner. The committee I am suggesting will include this person but more importantly it will include more students who will then learn about governance. It is time to look at your priorities and include this committee as one of the Top 3 priorities, **with a time table of one year**. I have witnessed that Indigenous youth attending university, or who work in youth centers in and around the GVRD, are resilient, productive, and have surprised me with the drive and determination to set a good example in their own communities.

I look forward to witnessing the changes during my final years at the University of British Columbia.

All my Relations

Rodney Little Mustache
Maistoo'a waastan "Crow Flag