



The Gateway Student Journalism Society (GSJS) Board of Directors Meeting — February 2020

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Chair, Continuity Rep | Oumar Salifou |
| Editor-in-Chief | Andrew McWhinney |
| Volunteer Representative | Nana Andoh |
| Community Representative | Robyn Paches |
| Continuity Representative | Lee Craig |
| Alumni Representative | Jonn Kmech |
| Students' Union Rep, Treasurer | Luke Statt |
| Editors' Representative, Secretary | Adam Lachacz |
| Managing Editor | Christine McManus |
| Director of Finance & Administration | Piero Fiorini |
| Online Editor | Tina Tai |
| Director of Marketing & Outreach | Pia Co |
| Guest, Former Editor-in-Chief | Josh Greshner |

MEETING MINUTES:

Meeting called to order by Chair Oumar Salifou at 6:06 p.m. on March 26, 2020.

1.0 Approval of the minutes

1.1 *Motioned by Jonn Kmech*

1.2 *Seconded by Luke Statt*

1.2 **8/0/0**

2.0 Approval of the agenda

2.1 *Motioned by Luke Statt*

2.2 *Seconded by Nana Andoh*

2.3 **8/0/0**

3.0 Reports

3.1 *Editorial*

McWhinney: I hope everyone is doing well despite the circumstances with the COVID-19 pandemic.

This has been the most solid year in terms of coverage for the UASU elections. We didn't face any controversy in our coverage and none of the candidates complained, at least to us. We got a lot of things covered like clockwork because we planned early on. I hope that it continues next year.

COVID-19 has changed everything for us. We put out a statement to students after things locked down that we would continue our important coverage, as we are an essential service and part of the U of A campus. We outlined in there the safety precautions we were taking and that all interviews and meetings would be taking place solely online. We are pretty lucky as all of our work essentially can take place online. So COVID-19 hasn't affected our actual operations in that sense. I attended a CUP meeting with EiCs across the country to share ideas for what they would do about print publications. Being online we really lucked out there.

Hiring for online and magazine editor is happening this week. Hiring is going on all through online means. It will be different for sure but a necessary adjustment based on what is happening with the pandemic. The other positions will be hired after that.

As well, we all know we lost the DFU campaign. That was unexpected to me for sure. We will talk at length when we go through the report submitted to us by the managers of our campaign. I really want to thank them for creating that document because it is a good thing documenting lessons learned and has some points for discussion. The campaign really turned on us at the Myer Horowitz forum when some SU executives bombarded us with what I would say were unfair and grossly unrepresentative questions. Our on-stage representative who is a volunteer with *The Gateway* did admirably but did not stand a chance answering those really biased questions. It was rough to watch and given our policy of not covering our own campaign was frustrating as we really couldn't respond. There were a lot of calls to not just vote against us this year but to actually defund us.

We've created a COVID-19 subheader on our website so students can really easily find our coverage.

3.2 *Magazine*

McManus: Obviously COVID-19 has severely impacted magazine pickup. We are having ongoing conversations about how this will be dealt with. Obviously March pickup numbers will be strongly affected. We luckily submitted files already for April and we decided we will go ahead with still printing those magazines. It made financial sense to still print them as opposed to the cost we would incur if we cancelled printing. Next year's team will figure out what they can do with April like using them for promotional purposes or something like that. In the meantime we will really push the digital version of the magazine for students to view from home.

I am really happy to pass on the strong precedent we set with magazine this year to the next magazine editor. Hiring is this weekend so I am excited to be part of that and then transitioning the next person into their role!

3.3 *Outreach*

Co: Most of the events we planned for March were in person events. Those have all been cancelled to ensure the safety of participants and our compliance with restrictions.

February Card Sales were super successful. Had 10 volunteers participate in it and we generated approximately \$120 in revenue from it. The volunteers who participated received a portion of the total \$300 sales based on how many cards they sold. The other expenses for that was printing out the cards and paying for the table itself.

Merch had to be cancelled as well due to COVID-19. It would be really costly for us to ship to people's homes. The idea was to have people pickup their orders from us so now we can't really do that.

The Photo and Art Show will hopefully be an online show through a website. It will be different but I think it is still important to highlight all the amazing and talented work created for us by our volunteers. The hosting fees for the websites we are looking at are significantly less than what we would have paid for an in-person show so this will be a cost-saving for the budget.

3.3 *Business and Ads*

Fiorini: Our new outstanding balance for the SU is continuing to grow. We got our new DFU cheque today so we will clear the balance, or as much of it as we can.

In terms of accounts receivable most of the ad revenue has come in. The remainder of ad clients for March many have said they will need more time to pay us because of the effect of COVID. But we should get all this money in. Three clients have cancelled ads for April, but the files were already to the printer. So this is unfortunate but we couldn't really do much to help this out.

In total we were able to raise over \$22,000 in ads. That is just over 60% of our goal. I think that is pretty good for our first year of in-house advertising.

Our deficit will be around \$10,000. This is almost all confirmed now. We still have April but with COVID this will definitely not help the situation. This is because of payment discrepancies, unpaid invoices from year's prior, our high professional fees, increase in insurance and liability, and underperforming ads.

3.4 Online Report

Tai: We got 62,500 views for February. A lot of breaking news again, such as the U of A budget, Budget 2020, and then the Purity Test. February 2019 we had 78,000 views. February 2018 was 66,000 views. So we were lower but still on course.

Purity Test last year was 5,294. Much higher than this year, even with the contra this year.

3.5 Discussion

Salifou: Piero, in terms of ads what are some takeaways you learned this year to pass on to next year's team?

Fiorini: We really need to look at long-term relationships. We should be aiming to get ads from the same people for multiple months or every year for the same issue. We should also find ways to book clients in advance for future years. Like if we could book someone for two September editions we could really help ourselves.

I think we also need to reassess our pricing. So many clients said no to us based on pricing. To my knowledge, the prices we chose were on rationale that made sense for us but not really for the market. So I think doing some market research to compare us and see what our niche in the market is would really benefit us. Like for example I know right now that our ads are actually more expensive than other Edmonton post-secondary publications. So getting real research to competitively price ourselves would be phenomenal.

McWhinney: And that is something we can even begin right now and hand off to next year's team when they transition in.

4.0 DFU Campaign and DFU Team Report

4.1 *Presentation by Andrew McWhinney*

McWhinney: First of all I want to thank the DFU team of volunteers again for their work. They assembled this report as a post-mortem with lessons learned, what went well and areas of improvement. I am presenting on behalf of them.

Biggest takeaway was that planning started too late. We didn't actually have things in

place until the final hour and by then the majority of volunteers we wanted had either committed to being on another UASU campaign or writing for elections and couldn't volunteer DFU wise because of COIs. Part of the reason why we started so late is because of the bylaw misunderstandings and challenges. So we didn't even know if we'd be on the ballot till late in the game.

Another thing was doing more class talks earlier in the election cycle. Reaching as many students as possible is critical and wasn't something they realized until it was too late.

Had a very small campaign team. Having a better team with more volunteers is quite important. This can better enable things like postering and tabling. Also tabling wasn't as effective as a resource for vote generation. The majority of people stopping by were those who already knew *The Gateway* and were going to vote yes, or faculty who couldn't vote. So knowing that is good because it gives context for next year's team in terms of priorities for time spent.

Ultimately they say the failure of the campaign is a culmination of failures of both *The Gateway* staff and board and also the DFU team itself.

One thing they pointed out is that they kept running into the problem of voters being approached and not even knowing what *The Gateway* was. If they don't know who we are and they see fee increase they will most likely vote no. So they encouraged us to ensure we were doing more outreach and brand awareness campaigns even before beginning to campaign in order to get better outcomes.

The report ultimately makes some recommendations on how to do better. First they say we need to focus on visibility and trust. For 2020-21 they suggest not to publish anything satirical or under *The Gateway*. It's too confusing for all students. They also said it is important for us to move ahead on some of the recommendations that don't necessarily require a large amount of investment we said we would do if we got the DFU increase even though we didn't. Would help show we are continually improving.

Ultimately, we know at *The Gateway* the value we add to campus. Now the task has to be to communicate that to all students.

4.2 Discussion

Co: It was incredibly difficult getting *The Gateway* staff and volunteers to help recruit onto the people onto the campaigns. I think there wasn't enough of a concerted effort to communicate just how important recruiting people was. And we need to recruit a lot sooner and more. I think the team did the best with what they could but next time management needs to actually follow through and do their best to help in this area.

Kmech: What do you think was the biggest flaw in our campaign?

McWhinney: I think it is twofold. One, not enough people knew what *The Gateway* was and secondly the value we provide. Then would go onto social media and see the furry article and class to defund us. So they would stop their research right there and vote against us.

Co: I think we also have to consider our ballot question as well. We didn't even compare to the wording of the SCF. Our question wasn't as well worded and even had some spelling errors. That cannot be a problem, especially for a journalism society.

Lachacz: After the election, I ended up talking to a lot of volunteers before the campaign and after the campaign. Before to try and recruit and after to see what they thought. The biggest hesitation for volunteers to join the campaign from what I heard was that they were worried about being on a campaign associated with the furry articles. Out of the eight I talked to six mentioned this. They were worried they would be perceived as the person who wrote it or the person who is friends who wrote it. I think this is an important consideration. Not only is the furry article something that the campus community doesn't like but internally people are worried and dislike it just as much.

Another thing to consider is that engineering had a very high voter turnout this time around as they had their FAMF up for renewal. Another variable to consider is that we should strategize and be aware of what FAMFs are coming and really market ourselves to those faculties as they will be voting and turning out to support their respective faculty home.

My question though is, we had current SU executives not only being forum representatives but actually actively campaigning by handing out literature, doing class talks, etc. In the past there has been clear leaves of absence. So where does the bylaw stand on this? Could we have had someone on staff help the campaign who isn't editorially involved? Because clearly the SU had staff involved actively.

Statt: The great thing about bylaw is that when it isn't specific the CRO rules. If you can get the CRO to agree to something as okay you are completely alright to do it. In the case of the current exec representing the campaign, that was something okay. The biggest key here is that you cannot work on something for the campaign while you are at work. You have to take a leave for the period you work. So just making up for time you spend working on campaign stuff after is something we used. It very much depends on the CRO.

Paches: We had to be clear that you weren't doing any campaign work when doing staff work. All prep work was after normal work hours and all that. I have always interpreted the bylaw as staff can work on the campaign but if they do it during normal working hours, you have to follow the fair market value principle where you pay them what they would normally be getting. So that is why working on it outside of working hours is important.

I really like this report. It is incredibly comprehensive and honest.

We need to really take to heart the report's recommendations on ground game and talking to people. During elections when I ran, you had to be talking to people or you were losing, guaranteed. Its hard but you need to run around campus and approach people. Get the word out. Never assume people know you. You would be surprised how many people never heard to the SU despite being at university for so many years.

I wholeheartedly agree with separating *The Getaway*. Too synonymous with *The Gateway*.

Now we need to make the argument super clear that we have listened, here's how we have improved. If we don't do that, we are guaranteed we lose again. So next year's team has to really emphasize those points. I am so glad to hear last year's core campaign team are coming back because that means they have experience and first-hand knowledge of running this show. We cannot lose or squander that advantage and we have to put the work in starting right away. Like tomorrow.

Salifou: I understand that staff are busy and have a million things on the go. I get that some volunteers do not want to be involved because of a controversial article. The fact of the matter is, in a campaign we need them. This is the existence of *The Gateway* or the non-existence of *The Gateway*. This is an effort putting time into. That importance needs to be conveyed. We have to prioritize this. It has to be all hands on deck. There is no option to not be involved. When we had our plebiscite last time, everyone was involved from the EiC to line editors. There cannot be a divide between doing my articles.

Greshner: Tell staff while you are hiring them, this will be part of the deal. You have to be part of this. You want to work here, there is no choice.

Salifou: In terms of the retraction, I believe the damage done by the furry article has been done. Retracting it is too late now. It will not be making the impact we want it to. I say we ride it out at this point.

We decided at the time to not retract the article. I remember publishing it and right away we got so much blowback and angry reactions. The strategy was to let it die out and never talk about it again. So now to do something is a lot harder. Plus, to retract something just because there is popular demand is not a good policy and bad journalism.

Craig: Regarding the retraction, to bring up the story again is not a good idea. It will bring it back to the forefront and bring it to people's attention once again. The focus now is changing the story. We cannot let these two articles define us. Spin the narrative

around to the other 998 articles a year we publish. We have to focus it on the future of what will happen as well.

Statt: I agree. Time spent addressing this is useless at this point. Focus on showing articles that are amazing. Like this year, the News coverage has been so on point and on fire. You need to do stories that people care about, like the Holodomor controversy, Budget 2019 and Budget 2020. People remember that and they share it. So always have that focus in mind. Those quizzes that *The Gateway* introduced? You do it and forget two seconds after. Reading a really valuable story or magazine? You remember and talk about that.

Paches: One point that needs to happen and be shown is the amount of coverage *The Gateway* does during SU elections and throughout the year as compared to other campus publications. It is night and day. *The Gateway* is such a better publication than the other campuses, minus *The Ubysey* and a couple of the Quebec papers. Show the quantity and quality of coverage *The Gateway* does.

We also need to critically think about the role of the board and editorial. There has been a divide and wide latitude given with the board and editorial decisions. The longer I spend on this board the more I think about how the divide shouldn't be there. We need to work closer together. That has to be a structural concern.

5.0 Gateway Alumni Twitter

Salifou: So Josh Greshner had this idea of creating a twitter account that would promote Gateway alumni content and retweet their content to show the greater impact *The Gateway* has on journalism as a field in Canada. Let's put the proposal he has submitted to us to a vote. As per the proposal, Gateway staff would have a password and could ultimately delete something they deemed inappropriate or something like that. Take a look at the proposal and we will talk more next meeting about it.

6.0 Staff Changes for 2020-21

Lachacz: Last meeting we went through the creation of a separate B-Unit. I will give a quick recap today.

Presentation given to board

Salifou: Based on the time we are at right now, I suggest we have some discussion and then put this to an email vote. The board was sent all the related materials and reports created outlining the proposal.

6.1 Discussion

McWhinney: After speaking with Adam 1 on 1 and seeing the reports I have to say the proposal is thorough and clear. I am in support of it. To go with these changes and

experiment with B-Unit is a huge step forward for *The Gateway*. Ad-revenue is going to become more and more important. Having an ED is going to be even more important come next year with the DFU campaign.

Paches: This is a great idea and mirrors other not-for-profits. I agree with what Adam said how a lot of our business decisions at *The Gateway* have been one-year escapades. This sets permanence and a system that makes sense and can have great results. Having staff to buy-in and get jobs for multiple years makes sense. It creates stepping stones and develops staff accordingly. So that a BAdmin can become an ED and be ready for the role. I am in support of the performance-based salary as well as it helps drive sales, which are critical to support us.

Greshner: I think this proposal is good. I question doing it now. To create a new job like this sucks. You have to find a person who is perfect for the role. You would almost need Piero for it. Finding someone to fill this role is going to be so tough. You can't just have anyone. Its up to you Adam and what you are willing to do. I personally think the priority should be to focus on the DFU campaign and not spend time on this.

Lachacz: I have already been talking about this position. One of the things I've learned as I've spoken to, is that people don't know we even have business related jobs. So getting that word out is important. Going into the DFU year, having a dedicated ad sales person will be super important. That way Marketing and Outreach can focus on the campaign and won't be hindered. Implementing this now is actually going to benefit us and enhance our argument come DFU time next year in that we are employing students from different faculties and in different roles.

Fiorini: This is the transition we need as an organization. The fact that there is no ladder here available for B-Unit minded people in terms of career progression limits the types of candidates who apply. A three person team and splitting the role is fantastic. Ads take time and effort. The ED can afford to do that now under this model without feeling bad that other things are being sacrificed. This will help drive alternative revenue as well.

Statt: Very much in favour for this. *The Gateway* needs to find better ways to operate. This structure does that. Business expansion will only aid in the editorial aims. This will help *The Gateway* take the lead in ad sales for campus papers. I say the next step now is developing a provincial or even municipal group that can leverage sales across all papers and share revenues to get bigger and better clients.

Salifou: With the speakers list being exhausted, I will send this as an email ballot. Look out for that.

Meeting ended by Chair Oumar Salifou at 8:50 p.m. on March 26, 2020.

Appendix:

Email vote:

Sent out on March 31

Deadline to submit ballots: April 1 at 1 pm MST

Motions to approve:

- 1) *Creation of the Business Unit with the Executive Director as the manager-level position and a Business Administrator and Marketing & Outreach Coordinator*
 - a) Result: Passed unanimously
- 2) *Elimination of Director of Finance & Administration and Director of Marketing & Outreach positions*
 - a) Result: Passed unanimously
- 3) *Proposed changes to staff salaries including: Editor-in-Chief (decrease), Art Director (decrease), Magazine Editor (decrease), Online Editor (decrease) as per report promulgated to board members.*
 - a) Result: Passed