



General Council Meeting

Online Meeting

15 April 2020

Minutes written by David Stokes

Attending

Olivia Trahair (President)
Maneesh Kelly (Vice-President)
Thomas Desmond (Treasurer)
David Stokes (Secretary)
Grace Cuddihy (Clubs Committee Chair)
Liam Martin (Welfare Director)
Stephen Beirouti (Events Director)
Skye Huggins (Assist Director)
Joshua Scardina (Sport & Health Director)
Umberto Gargaro (Academic Committee Chair)
Natasha Berthold (Environment Director)
Charlotte Lee (Marketing Director)
Saheb Aneja (Ordinary Council Member)
Erin Basile (Ordinary Council Member)

Attending via proxy

Apology

Absent



Opening

Olivia opened the General Council Meeting of the Notre Dame Student Association on 15 April 2020 at 6:22PM.

Agenda Items

1) Acknowledgment of Country/Silent Reflection

Olivia reads through the acknowledgment of country. The Council observes a 30 second silent reflection.

2) Passing of last minutes

Motion		
<i>To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 1st April 2020 as an accurate representation of what occurred.</i>	Moved: Olivia Seconded: Thomas	In favour: 12 Against: None Abstentions: Umberto
The motion is passed.		

3) Apologies and Absences

Motion		
<i>To grant a leave of absence for Saheb Aneja.</i>	Moved: Olivia Seconded: Maneesh	In favour: 13 Against: None Abstentions: Umberto
The motion is passed.		

4) President's Update

i. **Head of Campus and DVCA Meeting**



Following the reception of around 10 correspondence from students, these were brought to the Head of Campus and the DVCA. The first of these was regarding financial penalty. Notre Dame's had already passed so it was an issue of reopening it and then re-closing it which can't happen, but we were reminded of retroactive withdrawal, which allows you to not pay for a unit and have it listed as 'W' for withdrawal. Grace noted that the process can be extensive and somewhat excessive, and Liv said they didn't elaborate on this, but this sort of issue may be covered by Special Consideration. The university's general position seems to be that students should be aware of all the policies, and so Liv noted the NDSA should focus on making sure the student body is aware of the options available to them. Tash said that she had looked at the link for the assist, and the information is very vague and gives little indication of supporting documents required so the process can be stressful. Liv noted that there is the alternative option of contacting someone within the uni to make the university more collaborative which they will prefer. Grace is going through the process currently and outlined that it starts as a general form but it gets more specific and personal once you complete and submit the form. Tash noted it could be beneficial to students to be clearer with regards to what the process will require. Maneesh said that it is very likely that in the current context of COVID, the uni will likely be very understanding of all applications and hopefully relax a lot of their requirements.

Another issue was tuition-free week. This was raised within the uni, but said that the difficulty was that it would push back the whole calendar year by a week which would have larger repercussions. The way it was framed by the uni was that it was done by other universities for the benefit of the staff, and ND seemed to lack consideration for students. Tash said that her lecturers were some that could have greatly benefited from the week off, and the week off was hectic and disorganised, and that it doesn't seem from her school that the motivation behind the decision was not for staff.

Saheb enters at 6:30PM.

Another concern raised was financial. The university's response was that the quality of teaching should not diminish and so the cost of units shouldn't decrease. Liv put it forward that some schools are transitioning well whilst others are not. The lecturers have currently been given a minimum standard to reach, but some lecturers are going beyond and the hope is that lecturers will all begin to excel and that if students are concerned that they should come forward. The council understood that the cost of staff is increased given the increase in hours. Umberto noted that there is a minimum that lecturers need to achieve, and that it is not the fault of students if that is not being reached, regardless of the hours worked. He noted that he's not happy that the response of the uni is to hide behind documents and policies that they cannot tangibly produce. Grace said that there is no way that the same quality of learning is being achieved online as in-person, not all of which is the university's fault but some of which is. It is obviously impossible for some previous environments and standards to be achieved. Notre Dame's valued one-on-one experience is not achieved, and so the standard has undoubtedly dropped. It's quite a disappointing response from the university that they are trying to say that the quality of teaching has not dropped. Erin



brought forward that her course has offered alternative modules for prac placements but that cost the same on the presumption that the learning is the same which is generally not the same. The prac issues have also pushed back graduations. Josh questioned whether in the future this would allow students to choose between prac placements and other units, so the university saying they are equivalent can have long term consequences. Josh noted that in education, the order of units being completed is often crucial to the skills that need to be developed. Liv noted that the uni has been pushing forward the prac unit replacements as if they will be the same, and that they have also said that next year the approach will supposedly return to normal. Tash would like a written form of this response from the university, as there are a lot of students in confusion and frustration at the lack of certainty around their assessments and units. Umberto noted that in conversations with the university it should be noted that ATP students have been told they will be participating, and will be given a number of options.

Regarding special consideration, the university has extended the timeframe from 3 days to 7 days and have removed the requirement for 3rd party documents supporting. Also regarding to deferrals and irregularly scheduled exams are the options being advised to parent-students. There will be no late penalties with extension applications.

Regarding opt-in pass/fail, a lot of students are concerned with the pastoral care of the university given a number of universities have given students this option. This brings challenges including: the design of assessments for pass/fail is different to graded units; it would also impact those who are trying their best to get the highest mark. When first brought up, the university questioned why students are automatically assuming they will do worse, which seemed to Liv like a shocking statement as a lot of students are not coping well with online assessments. Liv was reminded that every assessment goes before a board of examiners and all assessments will be looked at and examined as with every other assessment. Liv has also heard from some staff that assessments may even be marked more harshly given students' ability to have their material in front of them without invigilation. Tash noted that one lecturer went ahead with assessments and assignments as they were scheduled and as they were designed despite the move to online, and this online element made the tests confusing and chaotic. Josh expressed that it is quite shocking to hear as a body that represents students, what can we do about these sub-par responses from the university? Liv noted that sadly a lot of what we can do is just relay information between the students and the university, we just don't have that independence and lobbying power that some other student guilds do. Liv also repeated the philosophy of the VC is that the student voice should be the centre of the university's decision making. Maneesh contributed that the NDSA's difference from other guilds is the lack of lobbying power and our necessary collaboration with the university, which can be very restrictive in our independent power. He also noted that the VC's desire to involve the NDSA is encouraging, but Josh noted that this is good but simply not enough and that it's upsetting how little the council can actually do. Liv expressed that the control the university has over the council. Grace referred back to the meeting when Selma and Rommie attended a meeting, where we were encouraged to bring concerns forward, but it seems like the university has changed their minds about this, and



says that we should as a council try and put our foot down that the response is not good enough. The relationship is obviously complex between the council and university, but at this stage there needs to be more accountability of the university. Stephen says that it feels like the NDSA is currently a glorified high school student committee, without any real power. He suggested writing a list of practical change that we can take to the VC. Liv said that there is support from the VC but that this is obviously a lengthy process. Hopefully we can make some preventative changes.

Some of these could be the President or the NDSA in some way attending the board of trustees, governors, examiners, executives etc. meetings. At the moment the highest board that the NDSA sits on is the NSB.

In response to the issues of prac units, the cost will stay the same but you won't be charged for units you don't attend.

Regarding exams, all information will be distributed by 20th April in a unified correspondence from all students.

Stephen exits at 7:04PM.

The approach for final assessments will be different from school to school. Liv noted that in the last meeting Maneesh said it was good that we can bring problems to the university, but we need to figure out what we can practically do. Margo suggested hosting a webinar with herself where students could pre-submit questions in case people didn't attend; Liv suggested doing different sessions with Margo along with the Dean of each school, separate sessions per school. These would give students the option to submit their questions before or live.

Stephen enters at 7:06PM.

The council was generally of the view that school-by-school webinars would be very useful for students so that they can receive individualised answers. Liv said that prac-related schools' webinars could also include the prac officers, and that the webinars could be recorded and later published.

Josh asked that whilst it's good that negative responses from the uni 'strengthen our case', the question needs to be asked what it is strengthening. Liv responded that we can draft a proposal for the National Student Board in time for the next meeting and also take the issues to the VC.

ii. Dave McLean Meeting

All campus buildings have been shut down and three hubs have been created for hygiene and safety reasons: ND1; St Theresa's Library; ND43 Customs House. Prindiville Hall is



closed but if the NDSA needs access to contact Dave beforehand. The library is also now swipe-card access, finally implementing something the student body have been suggesting it for a long time. Hopefully this will become student-wide. The gym is closed. Library hours are the same. Re security, the university is looking at different hours to have security but nothing has been finalised.

iii. NSB

We are sending off an NSB submission tonight. Matters included will be discussions about SAUNDA and their alcohol policies. It will also be brought up that academic transcripts will allow for recognition of all council members. Department-specific updates and matters will also be raised. We will also submit a draft MoU. The National Student Liaison position will be discussed including the election of a chosen student (this will not be implemented until 2021).

iv. Online Giveaway

The first online giveaway went really well, with over 50 entries received. The post engagements were very encouraging (see agenda).

5) Vice-President's Update

As-read.

6) Treasurer's Update

March profit and loss is attached. Tom also noted that the council should start looking at alternative ways to generate income, despite being a non-for-profit. Grace enquired as to the profit and loss report and the cost of the O-Day beach party, which Tom clarified was for the multimedia hired for the night. Tom continued that there are still expenditures even though the council is not running events, such as emails and the website etc., so there is a need for money to still come in. There needs to be money coming in if there is money coming out. Stephen suggested advertising the sale of keep-cups on social media, asking for Eol's from students.

Maneesh exits at 7:21PM.

Liv noted that most café's are not accepting keep cups so there might not be a lot of demand or need. There is also the possibility of introducing social memberships for students to grant them discounts to NDSA events. Both of these would be processes we would need to set up for when we can practically introduce them. She also noted that we are not losing any of the money from the university. Tom is concerned about looking forward at the budget priorities for next year.



Maneesh enters at 7:23PM.

Grace noted that hopefully the university will understand that the way the council has been spending money during this time is different from how we would have in other circumstances. Tom reiterated that hopefully the budget will not be negatively affected next year by a lack of spending, but that it is a possibility.

7) Secretary's Update

David noted that it is important that councillors toe the line between hearing students' issues and not dismissing them but not fanning the flames of frustration and discontent. Umberto noted that it is frustrating that the university always seems to be showing us a shut-and-locked door. David agreed and reiterated that the response to universities can be stronger but as long as we are not just encouraging negativity.

8) Clubs Director's Update

As-read.

9) Environment Director's Update

As-read.

10) Assist Director's Update

As-read.

11) Marketing Director's Update

As-read.

12) Sport and Health Director's Update

i. E-Sports

The idea was raised to have an e-sports competition for students, but the social sports team is already running this and have circulated requests for EoI's. Josh can try to collaborate with the process but it is happening either way. The uni is also running online yoga sessions etc. Liv questioned why the NDSA can't run them themselves.

13) Events Director's Update

As-read.

14) Welfare Committee Chair's Update



As-read.

15) Academic Committee Chair's Update

As-read.

16) OCM's Update

As-read.

17) General Business

i. Student Engagement

Liv put it forward how students are engaging with students. All universities are hosting online competitions. Perhaps Netflix watch parties. Liam said that the welfare committee has been encouraged to come up with ideas, and the suggestions are included in the agenda.

Closing

Liv officially closes the general council meeting at 7:34PM.

Confirmation of Minutes:

By signing below I, OLIVIA TRAHAIR, confirm that these minutes are a correct and accurate reflection of the meeting dated 15/04/2020.

Signed: Olivia Trahair, President