

AGENDA – 13th UNBSU Council Meeting

UNB Student Union 2019/20

March 20, 2020; 7:00 via Google Meet

Regrets: Mick Jefferies

Not Present: Adarshna Chhetri



1. Call to Order

1.1 Roll Call

Chair Gill performs roll call.

Chair Gill calls the meeting to order at 7:03pm.

2. Approval of Agenda

Mover: Fernandez

Seconder: Shibre

Vote passes unanimously.

3. Chair's Remarks

Council Chair, Gill, makes her remarks by welcoming council.

4. Approval of Previous Minutes

Previous minutes will be approved at next meeting.

5. Substantive Business

5.1 Craig Fernandez: COVID-19 Update

President, Craig Fernandez, presents an update on UNB's decisions and decision-making process regarding COVID-19. Essential services are currently the only things open at UNB, everyone else is completing their work from home. Two UNB students were presumptively diagnosed with COVID-19, everyone in their classes have been notified. Campus will be decontaminated before opening again, the date of reopening is still unknown and will likely be in a few months. Decisions are being made by a working group led by Associate Vice President Academic, Kathy Wilson, who also has her PhD in

nursing. Craig would like to have a conversation regarding the academic update that was sent on behalf of the President's Office.

Shrestha: "Do you have any updates regarding graduation?"

Fernandez: "It is hard to predict and depends on the spread of virus. Public Health says this is likely to last for months. The university would make alternate means to ensure that graduation is properly recognized."

Bensler: "The University of Calgary sent out a survey asking students if they feel supported and how to improve. I am curious if a survey like that is in the works at UNB."

Fernandez: "I have not heard anything, as I think the focus has been primarily academics. That is a good idea and I will bring it up to the committee."

Evans: "Are students able to get transcripts for graduate schools or jobs?"

Fernandez: "The Registrar's Office is still open, so you can contact them. All student supports are working remotely and can complete most their tasks from home."

Fazio: "A document was sent out to students with the recommendations of the committee. The committee emphasized trying to make things accessible for everyone and being conscious that not everyone has internet access. There needs to be more done in getting feedback from students, but it seems like there are a lot of thoughtful provisions."

Fernandez: "There was an emergency senate meeting earlier this week where we gave permission to the working group, chaired by Kathy Wilson, to make decisions on COVID-19. Unless senate could grant her the ability to make these decisions, she had no right to do so and they need to act quickly."

Lutes: "I do not think it is a good idea to give students the option to choose if their class is credit/no-credit (CR/NCR) or get a grade. We are dealing with the effects of an unprecedented global public health crisis. People are trying to arrange for their loved ones abroad to safely come back into the country. People are scared and paranoid that they could be infected or contagious. Student who have kids are trying to juggle a full course load with suddenly having to keep their children educated and entertained full-time. People are dealing with the loneliness of self-isolation. I think about when students

are applying to jobs or graduate programs and are seen as taking the easy way out by choosing CR/NCR. Will these programs and employers understand the predicament these students were in? Probably, but will the students who opted to have their classes evaluated normally have an advantage over those students? Almost definitely. Students will be disadvantaged, some through economic factors, some through living rurally or outside of Canada, some due to experiencing the primary and secondary effects of the crisis. In light of this, the only solution is to advocate for an evaluation system that keeps equality at the forefront. Grades are the last thing that should be on anybody's mind right now.”

Fernandez: “Those are valid concerns. It is the most vulnerable people who will be losing out in this whole pandemic. I think that a lot of admissions boards for professional or graduate schools would look at the date that the CR/NCR was assigned and realize the predicament of the student. I do not know if an admissions board would weight someone who took the lettered grade over someone who took a credited grade. Changing to online academics is also a different way of learning and, in some ways, it is a pretty poor judge of academic merit. Some students have concerns about the grade they obtain, through online means, going on their GPA, which is why the CR/NCR was offered. Some students need their transcripts to look as normal as possible because they are looking get into professional or graduate schools within the next year and they need letter grades and a higher GPA. They wanted to add flexibility, but I understand what you mean by perhaps disadvantaging students who cannot access internet or who are looking after family members. What are some recommendations that I can make to the university, in light of their guidelines?”

Lutes: “The optimal solution is to take the choice away from the students and say that everything is going to be CR/NCR this semester. That way no one is disadvantaged by lesser grades in comparison to those who choose to have it done the normal way. Another thing I would advocate for is an actual plan for students affected by alternate delivery models, students in rural areas without good internet connection, or who do not have access to a working computer full-time. I did not see anything specific in the document about how they are going to be accommodated, other than speaking to their instructor.”

Bouvier: “I think the best option going forward is to keep it as is and let the students have three options: withdraw without academic penalty until the last day of classes, CR/NCR, or receive a letter grade. This leaves a lot of options open for students and everyone can choose the option that works best for them. The SU has the job of informing students on the implications of these options. This approach is also being incorporated at Dalhousie and Memorial.”

Jardine: “Consistency is key and I am for the CR/NCR system.”

Brimicombe: “If we move to a CR/NCR system, a lot of students in their final year would not have the opportunity to have their grades affect their GPA in a positive way. It might even be the playing field at UNB if we move to that system, but it would not even be the playing field for students competing against other schools. We should stick to the system that was just announced.”

Penney: “If our graduating students do not have the option for letter grades, it puts us at a disadvantage compared to students across the country who do have letter grades.”

Wilson: “A lot of graduating students are looking for that GPA boost at the end of their last semester so it might not be as fair to them.”

Pittman: “The CR/NCR system is being proposed nation-wide. The University of Alberta is doing the same thing so we would not be the only school disadvantaged for people applying to professional schools.”

Fazio: “The current system is more beneficial because it gives students the ability to make that decision for themselves and choose how their grades are going to be affected.”

Lutes: “I would push back because it is good to have options if you are not super negatively affected. The problem is that the minority of students are disadvantaged and feel that they have to choose to go CR/NCR due to their circumstance. The students who are in a comparatively better position do not have to make that crucial choice. The rationale for having it as a university decision, rather than a student decision, is that students are then able to explain to future employers and programs that this was not something the student had control over, so they cannot be disadvantaged for it. Based on the system of choice, students who chose the CR/NCR system might be seen as having taken the easy way out, which

would not exist if the choice was made by the university. There are other schools who are going down this road and it is important to be thinking about students in the minority who are going to be disproportionately disadvantaged by this.”

Fazio: “In senate, we have discussed the issue of needing a certain number of grades to be assessed for the academic year.”

Pittman: “To my knowledge, they are going to be figuring out a new way to combat this, such as maybe only looking at first semester.”

Fazio: “That might be something the union wants to advocate for, when we have discussions with administration. It is important to assure that we will be assessed fairly and consistently in all faculties.”

Evans: “What happens to a person’s GPA when they decide CR/NCR?”

Fernandez: “If a student took all their grades this semester as CR/NCR, their GPA would not change at all.”

Jardine: “I am for the CR/NCR system. When you apply to professional schools, they give you the opportunity to justify any grade that may seem out of the ordinary. In a personal statement, you could talk about the decisions you made, but I think that using this for your statement would take away from talking about yourself. My situation is an example of how this could negatively impact someone. I currently have three options: stay with parents that are immunocompromised, stay at an apartment with an immunocompromised roommate, or stay with my boyfriend who can be called into the health care field at any time. If he gets called into the hospital, I will have to go into quarantine and choose between living with an immunocompromised parent or roommate. I am currently dealing with the healthcare needs of a lot of people, so if I were to choose the CR/NCR option, and someone in my class is able to get an A, I am the one who needs to justify my mark and it may look like I am choosing the easy way out when I am choosing what I feel is the safest option for me at this time.”

Motion to extend conversation by 15 minutes.

Mover: Zundel

Secunder: Pittman

Vote passes unanimously.

E MacKenzie: "It is important to consider that the majority of the semester, other than finals, has been completed in person. A lot of people worked hard for these grades and is it fair to say they cannot get the grade they deserve? Also, if you wait a few years to apply for graduate school, you will be competing against people who do not have this on their transcript, which could put you at a disadvantage. Also, a CR/NCR should not be seen as taking the easy way out, it should speak for itself and demonstrate that the student had other circumstances during this time."

Zundel: "I am for keeping it as it is with the options available to students."

Shibre: "Big universities like MIT have decided that everyone in their undergraduate degree will be CR/NCR. Are there any universities in Canada that have decided to go with CR/NCR? It would be good to have an understanding of where other universities stand."

Fernandez: "To my knowledge, schools that have moved to the CR/NCR system include University of Alberta and perhaps University of Calgary. Dalhousie and Memorial are providing options for students. There is no standard across the country."

Bouvier: "Students have worked hard for the vast majority of the semester. It would be silly for us to say that they are not allowed to have a grade that they have worked for and advocate in denying that for students. It is pointless to look at CR/NCR as a great equalizer. There are always extenuating circumstances for all students and we can never control that. There is always an imperfect situation where students find themselves at a disadvantage. We have solutions such as students can take CR/NCR, withdraw without academic penalty, or take the letter grade. These are imperfect solutions, but we live in an imperfect time and we should try to give students as much choice as possible."

Fernandez: "I understand that some students would hypothetically be disadvantaged to move forward with choices because they can be seen as having taken the easy route if they take CR/NCR. That is hypothetical and only applies to students seeking further admissions or seeking a job where their transcripts will be looked at. Other students are relying on this semester's grades and the grades that they have already achieved to boost their GPA, especially students who are trying to stay off of academic

probation and students looking to boost their grades as they apply for medical or law school. As a SU President, advocating to deny those students, who have worked towards those grades or are counting on those grades, would be a difficult stance for me to take and argue to the student body. It would be difficult to stand in front of the entire student body and advocate to take their choices away because it may have helped if they were pursuing certain career paths. That is not fair to everyone and I struggle to think about taking choice away from students. If equity is the conversation, there is inequity to not allow students to accept grades that they have worked for.”

Wilson: “Does the university have a plan for financial aid and scholarships for next years, and how this CR/NCR option would affect those students?”

Fernandez: “That has not yet been discussed. Currently, merit-based scholarships only go to students on the Dean’s List, but that requires a full year’s worth of courses to be assessed. Not everyone will have those so there needs to be a new system worked out.”

Lutes: “We are in the middle of an unprecedented public health crisis. For people saying that they have worked really hard for their grades, that is a totally fair point to make, but when you do that, you are prioritizing your own position over those people who will be disadvantaged. Stating that inequality already exists is not a good excuse. We need to do what we can for the people who are going to be disadvantaged by this.”

Mangusso: “Even if you chose CR/NCR, it does not mean that your grade is worse. You could still get CR if you got an A+ in a course. We want to consider that a CR is not worth less than any other grade. Everyone is in a very different circumstance right now and I do not think that a one size fits all solution is going to work. In every other circumstance, we advocate for students to have choice. There are currently not a lot of rules and people will be empathetic of that.”

Fernandez: “Thank you for your points Chris, I think the basis of what you are trying to say is that allowing students to choose would perhaps only advantage the students who are currently doing well, whereas moving to CR/NCR protects the students who are in more vulnerable situations.”

Lutes: “Yes and I think it is important to recognize our privilege as councillors. As people who are more involved in extra-curriculars, we are probably of the cohort where we are going to have good grades regardless of what we choose, but we have to think of the people who are not in the same boat.”

Fernandez: “I would like to talk further with people offline and get a better grasp of the situation. Perhaps people can keep considering this over the weekend and gather more points and we can have a vote on Sunday as to whether we want to move to CR/NCR or keep the options open. Immediately following the vote, I can send the resolution to administration. No guarantees that they will change their mind, but we can advocate for the position we choose.”

5.2 Ella Wiggins (CRO) & Rachel Bensler (DCRO): Ratification of UNBSU General Election Results

CRO, Ella Wiggins, recommends that council ratify the results of the UNBSU General Election.

Bouvier: “Is the Indigenous Representative an appointed position?”

Wiggins: “I was notified that the Indigenous position would be appointed by the current Indigenous Representative.”

Fernandez: “No one put their name forward to run for the Indigenous Representative position. I had conversations with Nadia about how to fill that position and she asked if that position could become appointed by the Indigenous Student Committee.”

Wysote: “I want Indigenous students to have control over who represents them. I will be in this position until the next person comes in and I will find someone who is willing to take my position.”

Fernandez: “That would require a bylaw change, but the bylaws are open and will be put in front of council on Sunday. If council is in favor of moving to this system, we can add it in the bylaws.”

Motion to ratify UNBSU General Election results.

Mover: Zundel

Secunder: Fernandez

Vote passes unanimously. Sean Mackenzie, Lidia Shibre, Tea Fazio, and Molly Pittman abstain.

5.3 Approval of Appeals Officers

Associate Appeals Officer, Melissa Lukings, is sworn in by President, Craig Fernandez.

Gill: “The two previous Appeals Officers had to resign for reasons related to COVID-19.”

Wiggins: “We recommended not to ratify the executive election, at this point, because there was a complaint put forward. There is an appeal going forward to the appeals board. It is the recommendation of the CRO and DCRO that there be no decision until the appeals board concludes.”

S Mackenzie: “Is it an appeal to the complaint or to the results of the election?”

Wiggins: “There were formal complaints given to me and the DCRO. We investigated and gave our decision. The appeal is on the decision itself.”

Gill: “We are supposed to have a third officer, but we are having difficulty finding someone. Melissa and I make the quorum, but I will try to find another officer.”

Lutes: “Could the CRO give any more specifics about the decision you made or the matter that is being appealed?”

Wiggins: “During the polling period, there was a bylaw breach for campaigning. It was dealt with and, at the end of the campaigning period, there were multiple people who came forward with a complaint and we investigated further. It was within the executive block, which is why we are not recommending ratifying it right now. We are ensuring that the identities are protected which is why, at this time, the complaint report has not been issued to the SU.”

Gill: “I received this earlier in the month. Normally we have ten days to respond, but as we were trying to set up, COVID-19 happened and it was difficult to coordinate, and the other officers had to resign.”

Pittman: “With an executive position, you are guaranteed a summer job, so I am wondering when this will be dealt with.”

Gill: “If I find another appeals officer, we will swear them in on Sunday and we will schedule a meeting for next week. An appeals officer is a law student who does not hold a position on any committee of the union.”

Jardine: “If there is no conflict, I would be happy to do it. I am a member of the Board of Governors, which is entirely independent from the SU. I am not on any committees and I do not directly report to the SU.”

Motion for discussion regarding if Chloe Jardine qualifies as an Associate Appeals Officer.

Mover: S Mackenzie

Secunder: Shibre

Vote passes unanimously.

Lutes: “I think it is a great decision.”

S Mackenzie: “I see how there could be concern, however, Chloe technically is not elected through the union. The union only represents undergraduate students, whereas graduate students can vote on the Board of Governors position, which immediately tells us that she does not report to the SU. She is also a non-voting member.”

Motion to approve Chloe as an Associate Appeals Officer.

Mover: Lutes

Secunder: Smith

Vote passes unanimously. Sean Mackenzie, Chloe Jardine, Tea Fazio, Kelsi Evans, and Khaleem Shaik abstain.

Associate Appeals Officer, Chloe Jardine, is sworn in by President, Craig Fernandez.

5.4 KJ Conyers-Steede: NBSA Fee Increase

Craig Fernandez sees his speaking rights to KJ Conyers-Steede.

KJ Conyers-Steede informs council of the work done by the NBSA. The UNBSU pays the NBSA to ensure that student voices are being heard provincially.

Fernandez: “I owe KJ and council an apology with regard to this fee increase. It was my responsibility to inform council and I had intended to, but I was travelling and then council was cancelled due to COVID-19, so the vote went forward and the fee increased without consultation of council. The cost is high, but the money is very necessary.”

Bouvier: “Can you talk about the partnerships that the NBSA has in terms of its contacts with provincial government officials. You also mentioned organizations like Future Ready, are there any other organizations that the NBSA works with, and can you tell me more about Future Ready and the work that the NBSA has put towards that group?”

Conyers-Steede informs that Future Ready NB started when the NBSA advocated for experiential learning for students in the Arts departments, to provide them with an opportunity to build their professional development. RBC and the provincial government really liked the idea of experiential learning and provided money for this program, which allows students to build their experiential learning paths for their degree. All universities in the province are allocated funding for the program and, moving forward, the NBSA will be incorporating colleges and high schools. The NBSA has a very small group of employees, therefore, in terms of their partnerships, they prefer to maintain quality over quantity.

S Mackenzie: “KJ and the rest of the NBSA are not only strong at supporting groups, but also with supporting individual students. They supported me in the letter I wrote to the provincial government. When I did not receive the response I was hoping for, KJ provided me with different resources, people to talk to, and a good approach. I attended the AGM last weekend and learned a lot about the NBSA. I noticed how much work everyone has put in to advocate for students. I thank KJ and the NBSA for being so welcoming and teaching me a lot.”

Conyers-Steede: “We have a non-partisan approach to our government relations and advocacy because we want to ensure that student issues are a New Brunswick issue, not a Liberal, PC, Green, or People’s Alliance issue. We believe that students are the future of the province, as you are investing into the province, and the government needs to follow suit. We put students first and we are now seeing government individuals and MLAs constantly saying the same. We understand that we have financial issues in this province, and we need to be creative in solving these issues.”

KJ Conyers-Steede details the proposed budget and where the increased funds will be used. The fee is increased by one dollar, to \$7.12/student. Increasing fees accounts for inflation and provides opportunities to expand as an organization. The NBSA will be adding a staff member to alleviate KJ’s

workload, which is currently not sustainable. The new staff member will be a Community Manager who will be overseeing student engagement. Changes in the budget: decreased office rent, supplies, and phone, and increased software. Increased accounting to ensure responsibility. Allocating more funds for marketing and branding strategy. Travel has been increased to provide mileage for employees who use their own vehicles. Engagement budget has been increased.

6. Announcements

McMillan: “As of March 21st, all preceptorship students are done clinical. As a student, it is hard to leave the hospital because we are training to be nurses and, in reality, nurses do not get to choose to leave during an outbreak. Horizon is looking to hire students and retired nurses. I will probably be busy with that and I am happy for the four years I have spent with council. Wash your hands!”

Bouvier: “We sent a few teams to the Canadian Engineering Competition in Winnipeg and UNB’s team won the first-place prize in the junior category!”

Fazio: “I am co-chairing the Girls Stem Up and we won a couple Red Awards! Executive applications are live on Facebook.”

7. Question Period

8. Other Business

Fernandez: “KJ did a very good job highlighting the NBSA, where their money goes, and why it is necessary. The fee increase is around \$6000 extra from our budget. We have been reviewing our final budget of the year, which will soon be presented to council. Revenues were significantly lower than projected because there were fewer students than what was projected to us, by administration. Our finals are where we expected them to be. We are not in a bad financial situation, but if we continue to drain our budget year to year, we could leave the UNBSU in a precarious situation down the road. The executive has discussed a potential fee increase. We recognize it is not ideal to do this during a pandemic, but we want to have a conversation with council about what a fee increase could look like. Advancement Committee has discussed this, and we have the lowest SU fees in the country. We will have a conversation on Sunday to discuss the financials and walk you through options for a fee raise. We would

also like to develop a plan to further engage the student body, if we would like to go forward with a fee increase. We are not comfortable increasing fees without the general body speaking to that. At the end of the day, it is council's decision to increase fees or not."

S Mackenzie: "Would that require coming to council, with the proposed fee increase, more than once?"

Fernandez: "It can be increased by resolution of council and recommendation of the Finance Committee. It must then be sent to the Board of Governors because the university collects the fees on our behalf. Just one vote by council and consultation of Finance Committee, but I would like to go further and consult students and perhaps have a general survey or referendum."

9. Adjournment

Mover: Zundel

Seconder: McMillan

Meeting adjourned at 9:25pm.