

executive report

may 2014 – december 2014

note from your executive

It has been an exciting semester for the ASSU Executive. Working with our members and our council, we have been able to achieve a lot. This report outlines what the union's executive has been up to in the last few months. We are proud of what we have achieved, however none of what is outlined in this report would not be possible had we not had the support of our council, our staff and our members.

We are an executive of seven however we rely on a staff of three and the executives of our 60+ course unions to truly achieve our goals. Our staff, Jane Seto Paul, Gavin Nowlan and Yoko Minoda keep our office running and ensure the union runs smoothly. Our course union executives, in addition to doing a spectacular job running their own unions, provide integral input and support for our campaigns and initiatives.

Finally, as a member of the Faculty of Arts and Science, you – the student, have done much to help us achieve our goals. Without the support of our 23,000+ students, we cannot do the work we do.

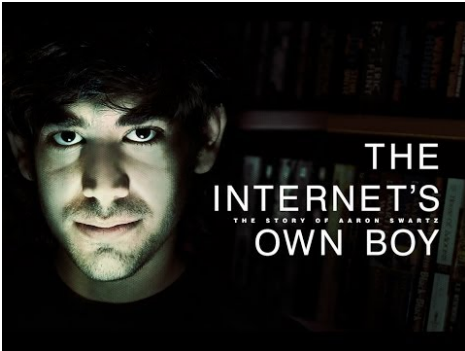
Yours in solidarity
the ASSU Executive.

Abdullah Shhipar, President
Lisa Chen, Executive
Uttra Gautam, Executive
Reid Dobell, Executive
Crystal Gao, Executive
Dylan-Chauvin Smith, Executive
Ariel Charney, Executive.

→ events

The Internet's Own Boy

Oct. 3rd - 7-9 PM - SS 2117



Kicking off our first event of the year was our screening of the critically acclaimed film *The Internet's Own Boy*. We invited director Brian Knappenberger for a Q&A after the film. The film follows the life of reddit cofounder, Aaron Swartz and his battle to keep the information accessible and free. The event was cohosted with OPIRG as part of disorientation week 2014.

Mental Health Week

Oct. 20th - 27th

mental health is a systemic issue, not just an individual issue.

Assu

As part of U of T's Mental Wellness Month initiative, ASSU launched its own Mental Health Week. In addition to producing anti-stigma materials, we held a variety of de-stressing events that week. While we hosted these events, we recognized that de-stressing is only part of the solution, that mental health is a systemic problem that needs to be addressed.

Oct. 20th - Java at the ASSU Casa

Kick off the week, we gave out free Second Cup coffee to students in the ASSU office

Oct. 22nd - Laughter Yoga

Organized by executive, Crystal, we brought laughter yoga instructor Salimah to take students through some laughter yoga exercises. Participants really enjoyed it and wanted more events like it. This event was hosted in the Multi Faith Centre from 2-4 PM.

Oct. 27th - Decorate Your Own Cupcake!

Organized by executive, Lisa, in the Sidney Smith Lobby from 11 AM - 1 PM, we had cupcakes available for students to decorate with frosting and various toppings. The cupcakes ran out quickly...



→ events



Ta-Nehisi Coates

Nov. 3rd – 7- 9 PM – Isabel Bader Theatre

For our keynote speaker this year, we brought acclaimed *Atlantic* magazine writer and columnist, Ta-Nehisi Coates. This past summer, he published a landmark essay on the case for reparations in the United States for African Americans. The event sold out quickly and many people turned out for the event, including U of T students and members of the community. The event was cosponsored by the Faculty of Arts and Science, the Centre for Study of United States, the University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU) and the History Department and moderated by Professor Peter Loewen. Many people reported that the lecture was captivating and that they had learned a lot from it.



Exam Jam

Dec. 4th - Sidney Smith Lobby

This year, for the third year in a row, we held Exam Jam with the Faculty of Arts and Science and other partners. The day was filled with fun, free snacks and coffee, massages, colouring and button making stations and more. Missed it? Don't worry, it'll be back in April for next exam season. 😊

→ initiatives

Course Evaluations

As many of our students know, in 2012, ASSU stopped publishing the Anti-Calendar since the Faculty of Arts and Science moved to an online system. As such ASSU's participation in the collection of course evaluations ceased. Since then, there have been a multitude of complaints regarding the usefulness and efficiency of the system. This year, ASSU has taken a number of steps to move towards a better system.

Beginning in the summer, we launched a survey of our students on the current course evaluation system. Nearly 150 people responded and reported that the system was difficult to use and by in large not helpful. A number of students said that they wanted the Anti-Calendar back. Unfortunately, ASSU cannot fulfill that request, however, we did take steps to negotiate with the Faculty.

Executive Dylan-Chauvin Smith came up with a variety of policy recommendations and following meetings with the central administration and faculty administration, ASSU Council moved to pass a motion that demanded the release of qualitative and quantitative course evaluation data. A working group within council was struck as well to work towards these goals.

Since then, we are pleased to report that the Faculty is committed to releasing comments to students and reforming the display of data. In the interim, canned comments (prewritten comments that describe the course) will be available for students to select when they fill out their evaluations. These canned comments will be displayed when the evaluations are published. The Faculty and ASSU are also working on a solution that would allow students written comments to be summarized and displayed like they were in the Anti-Calendar.

This is the progress we have made so far, we will keep you updated.

International Student Survey

Beginning November 2014, ASSU launched its #GlobalVoices campaign in an effort to find out about the issues that international students face. From November up until the end of the year, international students were invited to fill out a survey on their experiences at U of T. These survey results are now being summarized for presentation to the Faculty and focus groups are also being planned. A report on the findings of the #GlobalVoices campaign will be available in late January-early February.

→ initiatives

Undergraduate Journal

Executives Reid Dobell and Dylan Chauvin-Smith have been working, with a working group within council to develop an ASSU undergraduate journal. At present, the group has been working to create an editorial structure and will be putting out a call out for submissions sometime in the near future. Stay tuned for more information.

Funds for Ferguson

Spearheaded by executive Ultra Gautam, ASSU successfully collected more than \$100 for food banks in the St. Louis and Toronto area, as well as for the family of Eric Garner. ASSU matched these donations, bringing the total donated to over \$600. Donations were collected in person at our Exam Jam event and followed a statement put out by the executive condemning the grand jury decision in the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

#FundsForFerguson

Tomorrow, at Exam Jam - we will be collecting money for the St. Louis Area Food Bank and their efforts in Ferguson, MO as well as for food banks in Toronto.

We plan to donate \$250 for each. We will also have a donation box set up.

If we raise more than \$250, ASSU will double and match each dollar from that point for Ferguson and Toronto.

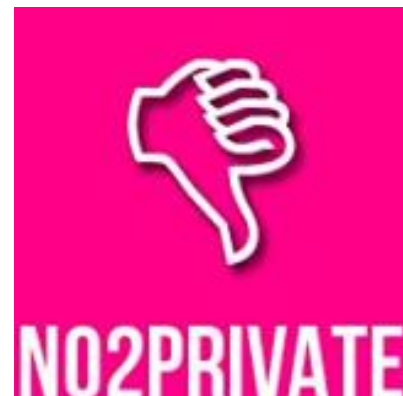
- the ASSU executive

ASSU Presents: ASKU

Started by executive Lisa Chen in the summer, ASKU is a video series that explores different resources and services at the St. George campus. Episodes have covered the Sexual Education Centre, the Athletic Centre, the ASSU office, etc. Watch out for more ASKU videos in the second term.

No To Private Review Companies

Continuing on a campaign started in early 2014, we urged students to think twice before using private review sessions. Providing an alternative narrative to the scare tactics found in flyers distributed by these companies, we pointed out to students the free resources they already pay for.



→ statements

The ASSU Executive over the past few months have also put out a multitude of statements. These statements were approved by the executive and were signed off as the ASSU Executive.

Statement on the IDF attack on the Islamic University of Gaza:

"The ASSU executive strongly condemns the targeting of the Islamic University of Gaza on August 2nd by the IDF. Universities, in conflict zones are much needed spaces for thought, ideas, and dissent and can serve as guardians of human rights. All combatants must respect the sanctity of these institutions and not engage in them in military campaigns. Universities like hospitals and schools are civilian installations and targeting them is a war crime, regardless of which side the fire came from. We call on the IDF and the Palestinian factions to refrain from targeting universities and we hope to see a peaceful resolution to this conflict soon."

Statement on Mens Rights' Associations at U of T:

Earlier this week, it was brought to the attention of the executive of the Arts and Science Students' Union (ASSU) that a large banner associated with the group Canadian Association for Equality was prominently hung in the Sidney Smith Hall lobby. ASSU does not control what goes up in the lobby nor who uses the space as it falls under the jurisdiction of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

This banner is currently allowed to be displayed because CAFE operates on the U of T campus under the guise of a student group called "Men's Issues Awareness at University of Toronto". While the names of these groups may seem to imply that their goals include equality and engaging in public discourse, this is not the case. CAFE has in the past invited speakers who have denied the impact of rape culture, over-exaggerated the rate of false-allegations made by female victims of sexual assault, engaged in transphobic and misogynistic rhetoric and questioned the very existence of the patriarchy. Broadly, the Men's Rights movement claims that feminism has gone beyond improving the position of women in society, suggesting that feminists are part of a system which actively oppresses men. It has become clear that these groups use talks about legitimate issues facing male-identified members of our society as a means of legitimizing their sexist ideology.

Full statement here: <http://assu.ca/2014/10/09/assu-statement-on-mra-poster/>

→ statements

Statement on Missing Mexican Students:

“The ASSU Executive expresses grave concern over the situation of 43 students from Ayotzinapa Teacher Training College in the Mexican city of Iguala, who have been reported missing after attending a protest against proposed changes to the education system. Students, across the world, have the right to freedom of speech and the right to protest. It is the actions of students like these, that have defended accessible, affordable post secondary education throughout history and across the globe. We stand in solidarity with the students and teachers of Ayotzinapa Teacher Training College, and our thoughts are with the families of those missing. We join Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International among others, in demanding that the students be safely returned to their homes.”

Statement on the Wedding of Solange Knowles:

ASSU would like to formally congratulate [#Solange](#) Piaget Knowles on her recent nuptials to video director Alan Ferguson. Ferguson has directed a few of Matron of Honour [#Beyonce](#)'s videos. ASSU would like to wish the angelic Knowles family all the best and thanks them for blessing us with their presence.

Statement on Ferguson Verdict:

“Tonight, a grand jury decided not to indict Officer Darren Wilson in the shooting death of an unarmed African-American teenager, Michael Brown. An indictment doesn't find him guilty; it just takes him to trial. Yet, the justice system failed Brown and his family yet again.

Tonight, we ask our students to ask questions. To question why our society accepts a justice system that discriminates upon colour, to ask why black men are killed by law enforcement and why no one is held responsible. To ask why this is allowed to keep happening over and over again.

Ask questions and demand answers. As we express our outrage over such a verdict, remember that Toronto is not divorced from Ferguson; acts of police violence towards First Nations people and people of colour occur all the time with a hugely disproportionate amount of violence being directed at black youth. For hundreds of students at U of T, this is the reality they face when they go back to their homes and communities; profiling, harassment and fear. Why?

Tonight, as we stand in solidarity with the people of Ferguson and we express our condolences to the family of Michael Brown, we encourage you to ask questions and demand answers, not just in Ferguson, but in Toronto and at our university [#BlackLivesMatter](#).

→ statements

Statement on Dec. 6th Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women:

“Twenty five years ago today, a man walked into Ecole Polytechnique and murdered fourteen women solely for the reason that they were women studying in a traditionally male dominated field. We remember them today, but we also remember countless other women who are victims of gender based violence, like Zahra Abdille - who was tragically murdered this past week along with her children. We remember the missing and murdered Aboriginal women who have yet to see justice. We have a long way to go.

We remember.”

Statement on attack on Peshawar Army School:

“The ASSU Executive is shocked and saddened to hear of the attack today on the Pakistan Army School, in which 132 innocent children and 10 staff members lost their lives. We strongly condemn this heinous attack and send our condolences to the victims and their families. To our students who may have gone to this school, you are in our thoughts as well. We stand in solidarity with all the students of the world whose education may be interrupted by the spectre of violence.”