



SWWho's UWho?

On the second floor of the Students' Union Building, the five members of the Students' Union Executive sit in their offices waiting for action. At the helm is SU President Samantha Power, whose voice represents the entire undergraduate population. Her minions, Vice-President (Academic) Amanda Henry, Vice-President (External) Dave Cournoyer, Vice-President (Operations and Finance) Chris Cunningham and Vice-President (Student Life) Omer Yusuf, work at her side and within the greater body of Students' Council to make decisions that affect you—whether you notice them or not. Ruling over almost 30 000 undergraduate students, I would like to introduce, your student government.

Written by Chloé Fedio
Photos by Josh Nault

Samantha Power — President

As VP (External) last year, Samantha Power was neck deep in dealing with off-campus issues, like the provincial government's postsecondary education review and working with the municipal government in the hopes of finally achieving a universal bus pass for students. Now President of the SU, she's taking more of a leadership role, coordinating the members of the Executive and adding cohesion to their many projects—and shifting gears from her usual beat.

"It was a little difficult to let them go," the political science student admits, "But it wasn't as difficult because there are really good people working on the issues that I was involved in, so it's really good that we can work together on them."

As President, Power spends her time looking at the larger picture and focusing on on-campus issues like the SU's financial troubles with the Powerplant and lobbying the Administration for more student input in academics.

Still, Power's focus on the postsecondary review last year—which came under question when then-minister of advanced education David Hancock, who spearheaded the review, resigned before the results were in—has helped the SU narrow in on ongoing concerns, like funding issues and the lack of student space at the University of Alberta.

"Our provincial work hasn't let up: we've been really active with this new Minister in making sure that the results of the review, as minimal as they were, aren't really forgotten and that they still need to be implemented," Power says, pointing to Ralph Klein's promise for the most affordable tuition policy in the country, which has yet to be announced despite his pending resignation.

Ultimately, along with the rest of the Executive,

Power hopes to help improve the quality of teaching at the U of A and promote the growth of student space on campus and in other provincial institutions.

"The five of us are students' advocates to the University and to the provincial and municipal governments: we're talking to those people on a daily basis and trying to change their decisions to be more student-friendly, and that has an impact on the quality of teaching that you're getting, how your professor interacts with you on a daily basis and how your student finance works," Power explains.

Amanda Hendry — VP (Academic)

Amanda Henry was the sole candidate running for VP (Academic), but it certainly wasn't by luck that she got the job. The fourth-year double major in Political Science and Middle-Eastern and African studies spent a year in training as Associate VP (Academic) and was ready to take over the reigns in May.

"The biggest change is that I don't have to order pizza anymore," she says with a laugh. "This job is a lot heavier on policy planning and issues type-things and the other job was more about coordinating volunteers."

Still, her role as AVPA has made for a smooth transition, and Henry is well versed on the plethora of academic issues that the SU deals with, from information and technology in the classroom to the review of first-year English classes.

Growing up in Hay Lakes, Alberta, Henry spent her spare time debating policy as a teenage politician, and was all too eager to continue on this path in university.

"I was actually involved in my student government in high school, as secretary of my high school students' union. Geek once, geek forever," said the Wetaskawin Composite High

School graduate.

And though the SU at the U of A is responsible for organizing social events and creating a community for the students it represents—much like high-school student governments—Henry stresses that this aspect is a small part of a much larger organization that takes on the responsibility of student advocacy in the hopes of improving the institution and the quality of education it provides.

"The reason I exist is because a university education isn't as regulated as a high school education; there's no such things as a diploma exam here, so it's totally up to the University in terms of what they offer and how they offer it," Henry says. "My job is to be the student input on those processes."

Dave Cournoyer — VP (External)

Every year, students hold their breath as they wait to hear how much tuition will go up—and how much penny pinching will be necessary to avoid a downward spiral into heavier and heavier debt. And after spending two years researching postsecondary funding and tuition at the SU, VP (External) Dave Cournoyer is launching into these issues with enthusiasm, lobbying the government and the Administration to create more student-friendly policies.

"The learning curve was still a little steep, moving into this position, but I think I have a bit of an advantage, having that experience in the past," he says. "I have that kind of background."

Like three other members of this year's Executive, Cournoyer is a Political Science major, entering his fourth year of studies at the U of A.

"It's the year of the PoliSci student. It's funny 'cause last year, there were three engineers in Exec positions and this year there are three political science students," he laughs.