

“The five of us are students’ advocates to the University and to the provincial and municipal governments”

SAMANTHA POWER, PRESIDENT

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CHRIS CUNNINGHAM, VP (OPERATIONS AND FINANCE)

Cournoyer is particularly concerned with the province’s passing of Bill 40 in the spring, an unpopular piece of legislation, criticized by students and members of the opposition alike, for taking tuition out of legislation. Despite the promise to make Alberta’s tuition the most affordable in the country, Cournoyer is skeptical that this bill will promote the creation of a more sustainable tuition policy.

“Whatever tuition policy this current government brings out, if it’s not in legislation and it’s only in regulation, students have no assurance that the policy will even be the same in six months. So it’s important that it gets back into legislation,” Cournoyer says.

For the past two years, students have been paying the same tuition levels as in 2004/05, but Cournoyer quickly points out that tuition has still been going up every year at each provincial institution.

“It was never a rollback: the University was rebated,” he says, explaining that the government has been buffering the cost, but not decreasing the high levels of tuition, despite their promise for the most affordable tuition. “I don’t think keeping the status quo creates the most affordable anything.”

Chris Cunningham — VP (Operations and Finance)

Chris Cunningham isn’t your average student politician; in fact, before he was voted in as VP (Operations and Finance) last spring, he wasn’t involved in the SU at all. But, despite his lack of practical experience in Council Chambers, Cunningham is adjusting well and is confident in his position.

“It’s been a really great experience,” Cunningham says. “It was pretty much exactly what I thought it would be; it’s been a pretty smooth transition.”

With close to \$10 million for an operating budget, Cunningham is aware of the responsibility he has to keep the SU afloat.

“I think most students would be just blown away with what we actually do accomplish in one year and what we’re responsible for,” he says, dispelling some misconceptions about the organization. “A lot of people don’t see the

distinction between the Students’ Union and the University—but they’re completely separate entities.”

The Economics student started at the U of A studying molecular genetics, but after three years decided to change gears and made the leap to the Faculty of Arts.

“I’ve actually been at this school longer than I’d like to admit,” Cunningham says with a smile.

So far, Cunningham has implemented former VP (operations and finance) Jason Tobias’ proposal to save the plummeting Powerplant, which has been operating at a loss for the past six years. Formerly a restaurant and bar all week long, the Plant will function under its traditional model from Thursday–Saturday, while it will be open as a student space from Monday–Wednesday. The Plant will also be sectioned off: what was once Dewey’s, the northernmost part of the building, will be rebranded the “Powerplant coffee shop,” while the easternmost section will provide buffet services.

“I’m really into trying to expand the business portfolio of the Students’ Union, so there’s still quite a bit of ideas on my radar,” says Cunningham, hinting at future plans the SU has yet to unveil.

Omer Yusuf — VP (Student Life)

Hidden behind a giant poster board of a red Transformer, which is trying desperately not to block the door to Omer Yusuf’s office, is a smaller cut-out of Captain Picard. These are just a few props being used across campus in the SU’s Week of Welcome events, whose slogan espouses a humorous ring: “Geeks unite.”

“If this year’s Week of Welcome theme hasn’t given it away, I’m a really big nerd,” Yusuf admits.

As VP (Student Life), Yusuf is engaged with planning student events, but he doesn’t want to limit himself to such a narrow scope of responsibility. Two major issues that have been taking up his time are the mandatory fees imposed on students by the University, and Aramark’s monopoly on campus food services.

“[My job is] anything that’s non-academic in nature, which is pretty much just a big sack of anything,” he explains.

While Yusuf feels that there’s a sufficient process that makes SU fees and dedicated fee units—created by a referendum and stating a specific use for the funds collected—transparent to students, there’s less information about the operation and collection of University fees that are part of students’ tuition.

“We’re trying to get mechanisms in place so there’s a better understanding in how those fees are collected just so that students have an input on a fee that basically levied against them for their benefit,” Yusuf says.

Aside from the issue of mandatory fees, the ongoing dissatisfaction with Aramark on campus has brought upon the creation of a committee, comprised of University administrators and members of the SU, with the goal of including more student voice in food services.

Yusuf, who graduated with a degree in Physiology and Developmental Biology last spring, feels kind of like the odd guy out, as the other four members of the Executive are studying in the Faculty of Arts.

But his history of involvement in student life—he spent two years as a science councillor and three years working at Orientation—keeps him well-entrenched in the organization and this year’s VPSL is looking forward to working with the SU’s many volunteers.

“I really do at heart still kind of consider myself a volunteer, and I try to remember all that kind of stuff when I go out planning,” he says.

Students’ Council

The five members of the Executive are part of a greater whole in student government: Students’ Council. Every second Tuesday, along with 42 Faculty Councillors, (distributed proportionally based on their population) and the non-voting General Manager and Speaker, Council meets to administer student affairs and manage other student organizations. From analyzing the wording of referendum questions, put to students to levy extra fees or promote radical change (such as banning the sales and use of tobacco on campus) to debating the effectiveness of SU services, Council spends most of its time bogged down in debate. The future political hopefuls meet in University Hall’s Council Chambers.

