



VP Student Affairs- Jermain Mckenzie

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I want to start off by thanking the student body for allowing me to be their representative for the last three years. It has been a life changing experience and one that has helped to mold me in many ways. It has not been an easy journey, but the experience has been greatly rewarding. So, I truly want to thank you all from the depths of my heart.

This year, I started out in a different capacity than what I had served in for the previous two years. I stepped down from being President and was elected to serve as your Vice President of Student Affairs 2018-2019 term. However, as fate would have it, I was thrust back into the role of President after the resignation of my successor. I was happy in my role as Vice President of Student Affairs, but I have been dedicated to the student body and so it was not a burden for me to once again assume the Presidency, though I was disappointed that previous President decided to step down.

While assuming a dual role was not considered a burden, I must admit that it has been very challenging. I have my internship which runs from September to December and so juggling it all has been a challenge, but it has also shown my level of dedication and commitment to the students at the U of R. I have not achieved all that I had hoped to achieve during my time in office but I am proud of the things I have achieved.

Over the summer, I worked closely with Haris Khan, our former President, to create the Career Development Grant. The issue of unpaid internships, which I am currently in the middle of, has been an issue for many students for a long time now. So, while we work towards ultimately having the unjust and oppressive practice banned, in the short term, we decided to use the very generous funding we receive from students each year to create a bursary for students doing unpaid internship. The fund was created with a \$20,000 allocation from URSU and with a donation from The Co-operators Regina. The fund came at a very helpful time for many students doing their unpaid internship and practicum, as within the first two weeks of the application going live, we had already ran out of funding for this semester. Next year, we will ensure that more funding is put in place for this important bursary.



During the summer, I worked closely to assist an international student who was at the risk of losing his status because he owed the university a few thousand dollars and his family needed some time to come up with more money. The student was in his third year and has already invested over \$50,000 in tuition to the university, but was now at risk of losing it all over a couple thousand dollars. The sad reality is that this story is not unique and many international students go through similar experiences on a yearly basis. Therefore, we have worked closely with UR International to create an emergency fund to assist international students when they are face with being removed from school and risk the possibility of being deported.

These bursaries will not solve all the financial hardships faced by some of our most vulnerable students, however, they offer a great amount of relief for those we are able to help. We will have to continue pushing back against the ever increasing tuition and the overall costs associated with trying to obtain a post secondary education. One way that I have tried to address this issue is by promoting Open Educational Resource (OER) as a way of replacing the exorbitant cost of textbooks. So far, we have had some success in a few more professors using OERs in their courses and saving their students thousands of dollars. However, there is a lot of work left to be done, and the hope is to have wide scale adoption across various courses. In an effort to meet this vision, I have worked with the UROpen committee to survey faculty about their knowledge and usage of OERs and we will be sending out a survey for students soon. I am also working to have the vision of making the U of R a leader in OERs adopted by the University's Board of Governors.

However, my vision is not just limited to OERs, it is grander and more far-reaching. Therefore, I have started working with the faculty association (URFA) to create a vision for post-secondary for our university and province. The project is in its nascent form and will be expanded to include as many voices as possible before it is finally completed and shared with the public and the government. We must have clear and grand visions if we are to truly solve the problems that have seemed so intractable for such a long time. I can't do it alone, and neither can URSU and URFA do it alone. We will need you and future students to commit to the idea of a truly universal and accessible education. We will have to belief that it is only through a universally accessible education that we will be able to live harmoniously and be equipped to face the immense economic, social and political challenges of our world today.

I will leave you with a challenge that I hope you will take up. Please take a greater interest in your students' union! We collect millions of dollars from you each year, and that money could be used in much better ways to serve you. Do not leave it up to a hand full of people to decide what



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to do with such an enormous sum of money! Please hold us accountable for every dollar and ensure that more of the money you give goes back to helping you or your fellow students. Please expected a higher level of advocacy and service from your students' union. We must not be silent and the issues that affect you, and we must never surrender to the attitude of this is the way that things have to be. We once believed at some point in our youth that we could change the world, and at some point we allowed ourselves to be deceived in thinking otherwise. I implore you to be bold and fearless in your advocacy for a more just and fair society. I hope that I have moved URSU slightly towards being more representative and answerable to you. I have six more months to work for you and I will work even more determinedly than I ever have before to ensure that you get a students' union that leaves the power and influence to you- the student body!

Thank you and let us never give up our vision of creating a better world for all of us.