

President's Report
Presented at the AGM held at the UCSA Building
on Wednesday 12 May 2010.

Background

When sitting in the chair for the first time I had FIVE phrases to test any decisions that were to be made:

1. Belonging and Ownership
2. Relevance and Reputation
3. Partnership
4. Commercial vs Service
5. Internal efficiencies

It is my pleasure to reflect on these phrases knowing they have been applied when the executive have charted the course of the UCSA this year. These phrases have not just been valuable, but determinative of our decisions.

2009 has been a year of unprecedented change. All the change has been for the positive, although not all of the positive will be realised in the short term. This was always planned for, which is to say the 2009 executive began the year seeking to create a "blueprint for change", which it has thus far achieved.

2009 has also been a chance to continue the work begun last year, guided by Michael Goldstein and his executive. Without their foresight some of the change although desperately needed may not have been as tenable or even possible. Thanks must go to the 2008 executive for the efforts made on all students' behalf.

Whilst thanking folk, the entire staff of the UCSA needs mention. They are tireless, committed and determined to do their utmost for the betterment of the organisation. Some have been here a short time, others have been here a very long time and all add to the organisation in some way. In 2009 I headed an organisation that discharges its duties to its members in a sophisticated way. Commercial activity offsets Service delivery costs and we leave a little in the kitty to ensure the future viability of the association. Special mention must go to Andrew Paterson (GM), Nicola Saintey (HR Manager), Jon Ward (Hospitality and Operations Manager). Their efforts this year have been beyond the call and they have lead their respective teams through some trying times. Thank you.

Belonging and Ownership

The UCSA reviewed and updated its mission statement toward the end of last year. Myself, Michael Goldstein and Andrew Paterson lead the working party, facilitated by Liz Henderson from Strategic Solutions. Both the 2008 exec and the incoming 2009 officers were able to shape this document, readying it for open consultation with the membership in November and December last year. After accounting for all the feedback the final document was adopted by the 2008 executive in their final meeting of the year. Our vision is characterised by the phrase "Creating Belonging and Ownership".

After 115 years in existence the UCSA has built up a commanding balance sheet, however that had not always translated into the most appropriate service delivery to the membership. The vision addresses this, and puts front and centre the need for students to have an affinity with the association that is charged with serving them.

To an interested outsider over the past few years, the UCSA seemed to have embarked down a road of asset sales. We saw RDU sold off, and a desire to sell Lyall Lodge and the surrounding forestland, under the guise of “core business”. This strategy did not make sense as these two assets were the only ones that were capable of generating revenues from beyond the membership base. As such the forestland sale proposal was scrapped immediately, in favour of an asset retention strategy. The UCSA is one of the only students’ associations in the country with its ‘treasure chest’ intact, and the benefits from this strategy are clear, control over our own destiny. We have always been and will always be a student owned, governed and operated association.

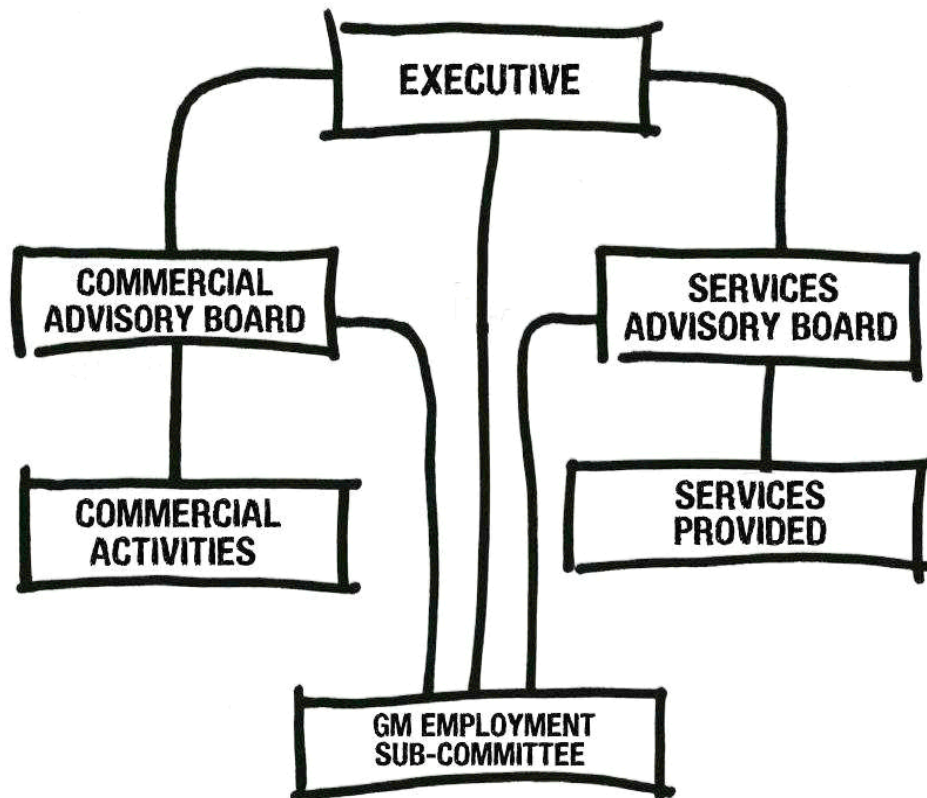
When framed in this way it seems obvious to suggest that in future the UCSA should look to take its commercial expertise and fiscal strength into the wider community to leverage opportunities. In this way the UCSA can increase revenues from the city at large as opposed to deriving revenues from the membership base, whom can least afford it.

Relevance and Reputation

It has been clear that as the revenues have grown over the past few years there has been a significant drop in both the perceived relevance and reputation of the UCSA. This has been the lament of many past executives, all trying to reverse the trend. The 2009 executive, in an effort to break this damning cycle, undertook to change the focus of the association to ensure service delivery was paramount and any commercial activity was to offset the cost of the services provided.

This is reflected in the Mission statement of the association “Enriching the student experience and culture by providing representation, services, facilities and phenomenal events”. Nowhere does it mention profiteering. This means that the core business of the UCSA defined by the mission has prime place in its psyche, and should not be displaced in order to make room for unreasonable commercial gain. In order to safeguard this approach the 2009 exec changed the governance model of the association. The exec remains as the sole governors, with two advisory boards populated by both exec members and external members (who bring need competencies to the boards) making recommendations to the executive. Armed with all the information, context and reasoned thinking by the advisory boards the exec will then make final any decision that needs to be made.

Both Advisory Boards will have personnel who are competent in the relevant areas they are responsible for. This means that both the service elements and commercial elements will be well governed and able to operate separately from each other. I have included a diagram of the governance structure implemented after approval at the 2009 AGM.



Partnership

The 2009 approach to initiatives has been to build partnership. We have anchored our community involvement in this way, starting with the Com-Be zone. After a myriad of complaints from various members of the community there was a call from members of the city council to introduce a liquor ban in the area around university.

The UCSA fully opposed this idea, and struck an accord with other licensees around the area to form the much-publicised Com-Be zone, allowing anti-social behaviour to be dealt with internally and avoiding the need for police or university involvement.

A similar approach was taken with the student levy. After sitting in the room informing those decision makers as the needs of the students the levy was proposed in the most palatable way it could be, given the significant extra cost to students.

The partnership approach allowed the UCSA to achieve what no other student association in the country has managed and that is a steering of where the money is spent. The money is ring-fenced and cannot be spent on any random initiative of the university, it can only be spent on student services and space. Finally those overtly disaffected were accounted for by making sure the levy was apportioned equally over all students. The lifetime cap, distance rebates and semesterisation of the levy have all helped to this end.

Despite the obvious burden the levy encumbers students with, these benefits could not have been gained by any other method than involving ourselves in the discussions. It would be prudent for the 2010 executive to continue with the partnership strategy, both in the community and with the

university. There is much to be gained by ensuring the UCSA is open and communicative with its neighbours.

Commercial vs Service

In order for the UCSA to remain focussed on the providing pastoral care, welfare and support services the association needs to ensure the viability of its operation remains sustainable. This has meant distinguishing what is to be run as a service and therefore be provided at “any reasonable cost” and what should be treated as a commercial activity and allow the market to direct the operation. Ultimately this means that the needs of both elements can be accounted for in the quest for optimum service delivery. The model It also allows the governance model to operate in clearly defined terms, with no possibility of commercial gains subsuming service delivery as has been the case in past years.

As to what falls into these two categories, this has yet to be decided, and a white paper will be circulated to the membership shortly to gauge student opinion on the matter.

Internal Efficiencies

The UCSA currently employs 181 staff (83 full time equivalents) across the breadth of its operation. Although all staff, as mentioned, work hard for the association there are some areas that have been identified as inefficient.

A new organisational structure was proposed, duly consulted on and finally approved by the executive. The purpose of this new structure was to find all internal efficiencies available without jeopardising the quality of the services and offer provided by the UCSA. There was NO element of asset sales, nor was there any risk of service cuts as an outcome of this process. The 2010 executive now have the beginnings of an organisational structure which can be both nimble and responsive to the needs of the membership.

2009 Achievements.

Refurbishment of Lyall Lodge. The first stage of this was completed with the support of CUBA, to whom we must thank. The Lodge is open for use and further work will be done as required.

The Executive provided free lunches in term one around the campus and expanded this to the \$2 Soup Kitchen opened at the start of Semester two. This has meant a hearty hot meal was provided for those with limited funds every day of the uni week.

As a bonus gig the POTBELEEZ came to play late in term one. This was a success and enjoyed by all those who attended.

\$5 flu shots were provided in association with the UCSA and the Health Centre. This has proved worthwhile over the past few years and should be factored into the budget again next year.

Club Funding and Resourcing has been increased this year. The UCSA have built a knowledge bank, resource bank and piggy bank for the support of all our clubs. This has seen \$30,000 in increased funding made available and various other support increased to affiliated clubs and societies.

We have advocated for you in the various appeals and disciplinary hearings, we made sure your voice was heard on academic matters, facility planning and service delivery.

The UCSA managed to get what NO other students' association has done when we won the right to steer the apportionment of the service levy. We made sure it was ring-fenced so that it can only be spent on services and student space. We also made sure it was fairly implemented across all students.

Along with the strategic plan the asset master plan has been formulated to help guide us through the UCSA building revitalisation. This will mean that the UCSA has better facilities and resources to help support ALL students. As this report is being written stage three (architectural concepts) is currently underway.

Conclusion

As stated it has been a year of unprecedented change. To ensure the ongoing viability and sustainability of the UCSA the membership needs to ensure that it is both satisfied with the elected representatives and arms them with all that is required so they can continue to enrich the student experience and culture by providing representation, services, facilities and phenomenal events, thus creating belonging and ownership amongst all members.

Steve Jukes
President 2009.