

# The March meeting presidents of the UTSSA meeting with management:

Hello and welcome back to another episode of Anna meets with Management. A truly thrilling series.

On the 17th of March just before close of business hours I met with Shirley Alexander the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Education and Students about the goings on of the Students Association. On the agenda was the allocation of SSAF funding for the Students Association and space allocation in the university. I was focused on proving that management was underfunding the Association to an extent in which our services such as BlueBird Brekkie have been compromised which is having a tangible impact on student welfare.

In my meeting with Shirley I presented our expected expenditure to her, giving clear reasoning why her budget was not sufficient. She expects us to run services including the Student Advocacy, the Legal service, Vertigo, Night Owl Noodles and BlueBird Brekkie and Collectives at a 2019 capacity with 20% less funding. It is impossible. I ran her through where our funding would have to be cut. As a lot of expenses of the Association such as Vertigo, Legal service, and Advocacy are fixed at the beginning of the year, the only feasible place we can cut costs from is BlueBird Brekkie/ Night Owl Noodles. Obviously this is not something we want to do as this service is essential to feeding students on campus. It has run successfully for a decade and it would be dreadful to see it taken away.

What was pleasing to find out is that the estimated budget management has given us is a minimum and they will take into consideration the data I provided to come to a decision on further funding. Shirley told me that she had to wait for;

1. Our UTSSA audit (due at the end of the month)
2. Census date (when she would know total SSAF)
3. Her meeting with the Vice Chancellor on this matter

before she could tell us any increase in budget. She did mention that as an organization she would like us to cater our services to the 5000 international students still stuck overseas. Mind you, the only service of ours not catered to off-campus students is Night Owl Noodles and to some extent the Legal Service as they are not equipped to deal with international laws. Our Casework and Advocacy, Vertigo, Peer tutoring and most collective meetings/events can all be accessed digitally. However, I do agree, we can always do better by our international students, and we should be addressing this, not just because Shirley has told us to, but because these students are already heavily exploited by our university and require support from their union. I have already begun working with Vertigo to ensure they provide for their international students audience and as an Association we are working to bring back the International Student Collective.

Another issue she has with the organization is unfortunately with Vertigo. She believes that the production quality of Vertigo is too high quality, and wasting SSAF fees. While we have already approved the budget for Vertigo for the year, we will need to work with the magazine to provide more online content for students stuck overseas. We may also need to look into whether we can justify the print quality of the magazine in the coming years.

Finally, in quite a rogue turn of events, Shirely made it clear to me that she would like to see the collectives more active in the coming year. I don't know if this is a good thing or a bad thing. Have collectives become so apolitical that she views them as nothing more than social clubs? Or has she, as she nears retirement, become a staunch supporter of activism on campus? I suspect it is neither, and she is just disconnected with the issues and campaigns our collectives are fighting for. Regardless, collectives on this campus have the ability to grow and garner wider student engagement this year and should continue to do so, with or without Shirely's blessing.

The issue with SSAF funding is systemic. As a union due SSAF should be given to student unions directy. Bargaining with management gives them an unacceptable control over our finances. Further, the processes in which they allocate these SSAF funds are unclear and poorly regulated. From what Shirely would tell me, the allocation is decided by her and the Vice Chancellor after meeting with key stakeholders. No *be/loved* committee. Nothing. It leaves us waiting half the year for financial security and begging her to let us fund services like Blue Bird which provide essential support for students. They keep this unclear so we are unable to properly fight back. It is unacceptable. We have continued to push our SSAF campaign on council, but the efforts have been lacking recently. I encourage you all to continue to get involved.

In the past few weeks I have also been in negotiations with various members of management about consolidating the Students Association spaces on campus, and brought this up with Shirley. I have recognised these priorities for space management of the Association:

1. **Expanding Safe spaces;** Student spaces have been removed systematically for the past few years and the university has become less and less willing to allocate us space. The current Queer and Womens spaces are inaccessible and windowless. The campaign for the Ethno space has been knocked back despite long standing demands by students. The disabilities safe space in Building 5 was removed, and has not been reinstated.
2. **Engage with students:** The UTSSA always struggles to engage students with, and promote our student services especially since we are hidden away in low traffic areas of the university.
3. **Centralize our Services:** The services and offices of the UTSSA are spread across the university. As we return to campus this distribution across the 3 levels of Building 3 and then 1 make it difficult to communicate with each other and run a cohesive Students Association. It also means students find it difficult to access all our services, and link these services to the association.

4. **Ensure the longevity of student services:** Services of the Students Association such as Blue Bird, Night Owl will survive long term if they have a permanent space on campus. This makes it easier to set up/ pack up our services, and also means that we can give staff longer, more permanent hours.

I have been digging around the university trying to work out which (possibly underutilized) spaces the Students Association could take on. In this mission I identified the Food Co-op. Members of the Association had previously had discussions about using this space without action. I brought this up in my meeting with Shirley and after the meeting submitted a proposal to her about using the space. It has been accepted!! We are planning on running the service through donated goods, like canned goods, pasta, rice, sanitary items, condoms e.c.t. Students could come into the pantry and collect goods as they pleased and take these items for free. The finer details still need to be sorted out, but in the coming weeks we will be setting up some working groups for students and members of the university community to get involved. I am truly very excited about the possibility of using this empty space to provide a really practical service for students. If you want to help out please shoot me an email at [president@utsstudentsassociation.org](mailto:president@utsstudentsassociation.org)

I also talked to Shirely about the possibility of using the old Bites Cafe which is currently a storage room for a permanent location for Night Owl. Further, I have discussed with Shirley and space management ways for us to consolidate our collective spaces around the Student Association reception in Building 1, which also might be successful. All exciting prospects which I should be able to report back to next month. I also hope that I will be able to get back to you all with a proper funding agreement for the Association in my next meeting report.

Thank you for reading this far. If you have any issues you want me to raise at my next meeting with the Shirley DVC (Education and Students) feel free to contact me!

Thanks Anna