

What ACTUALLY gets discussed when SRC reps meet with the University. A BTS look.

Representatives of your Students' Association meet with Shirley Alexander, our Deputy Vice Chancellor of Education on a monthly basis to convey the concerns of students to the University. On the 11th of February the UTS Students' Association ('UTSSA') President Anna Thieben and General Secretary Sabine Yassine attended this meeting to discuss the current priorities of students and understand both the current and future position of the University on key objectives of the UTSSA, to get an insider's scoop if you will.

What was on the agenda?

- Introduction - Update on the COVID response and return to campus
- Removal of in person tutorials and lectures due to COVID-19
- Zoom captioning
- SSAF funding
- Bluebird Brekkie and Night Owl Noodle - On campus space expansion
- Climate Rally
- General business

Removal of in person tutorials and lectures due to COVID-19

A good starting point and area of key contention is the method of returning to campus post what has been a primarily online learning space. This revolves around the lack of in-person tutorial options and the complete removal of in person lectures, without any vision to bring them back to campus, but rather opt for bite-sized videos for students to watch with more online interactive content.

A running theme of student feedback to the Association has been the key desire for varied teaching methods, including in-person classes - rather than purely online modes. This is especially due to the lack of in-person interactions in the recent pandemic-riddled years and the fact that in person lectures gives students the unequalled opportunity to connect with their lecturers, ask questions and form relationships which can give way to crucial internship or career opportunities down the line. This did not align with the University's current long-term plans to never reinstate in-person lectures. The Association and its representatives will continue to work towards ensuring that student interests are kept front-of-mind for long term University teaching plans.

It would be remiss not to note that the Students Association values the accessibility of online course material especially for students overseas; accessibility has always been at the forefront of

the Association's purpose however students should be able to make the choice of their preferred mode of delivery, by the University offering those choices.

Zoom captioning

The discussion then turned towards the availability of zoom captions; a feature that the Association has been working towards establishing since the beginning of the pandemic. In a win for the Association after various deliberations the University has begun its trial stages of the program by rolling out the Verbit captioning engine on zoom for students currently registered with accessibility.

If at this trial stage the program is found to be successful for students and proven to be an effective tool, it will be implemented University wide. This will make all lectures, tutorials, group work and meetings accessible to students, as they always should have been.

SSAF funding agreement

Under current SSAF legislation, the Student Association is funded by a portion of your SSAF fees. These fees do not go directly to your Student Union but rather first to the University which distributes SSAF to a number of areas within the University, including Activate clubs, the UTS radio station, child care center and careers resources. This year our student union is working hard to make students understand what SSAF is and what these funds are being spent on. In working towards full transparency, the Students' Association requested the detailed breakdown of how our SSAF is allocated among university services, which has been provided upon request.

Before the pandemic the Association was run by 3-year funding agreements with our funding steadily increasing as we offered more and more services. However, since 2020, the UTSSA has had to bargain annually for a portion of SSAF each calendar year, which has decreased by 20% in this time. This makes continuity difficult for each in-coming council and creates a level of uncertainty and insecurity, wherein long-term planning remains challenging, as without knowing the amount the Association has to spend it can be difficult to allocate costs and run our key services such as Bluebird Brekkie.

A significant objective of the representatives is to continue to seek out a long term, increased funding agreement for the Students Association. This will allow us to be the most effective and efficient body possible, as well as run our services to their full potential to ensure the greatest benefit for students.

Bluebird Brekkie and Night Owl Noodle - On campus space expansion

The Association's most popular feature remains our free food services; Bluebird Brekkie and Night Owl Noodle. However, with the cuts in funding and lack of certainty due to the pandemic it has been a challenge to run consistently. During the height of the pandemic the Association offered "take-away" breakfast bags, then with a slow return to campus in 2021 the service returned, only to be dissolved once again as we went into another lockdown.

However, with a hopefully full return to campus, the service is beginning to ramp up to full capacity however a challenge remains with the management of spaces as currently the service does not have a permanent place in the University. More permanent space allows for greater security as staff can be hired more permanently, and the space can be opened for longer hours with less set up and pack up required. This sparked discussion and dialog into the potential spaces free for use and ways in which we can prioritise the most effective carrying out of this significant service.

*Note: after the conclusion of this meeting the student Association representatives followed up the request and an inventory called the "Cube" was secured as a permanent space for BlueBird Brekkie. The challenge of funding for this service still remains.

Climate Rally

In a WIN for student climate activists, the university has agreed to endorse the March 25th Climate Strike. Last year and in 2019 students petitioned for weeks to achieve this, and so we stand on the shoulders of giants when we approach management with this demand.

University endorsement is not a required but rather a favorable outcome to encourage students and staff to attend. However, the University's ties with known fossil fuels companies should be noted as we work towards complete divestment within UTS's investments.

So, there you have it, hopefully this sheds some light on what actually gets discussed when your elected student representatives speak with the University on behalf of students. There is much being achieved but also a lot to work towards and this can only be accomplished with continued student support and the force of student voices behind our campaigns so keep an eye on our Facebook @UTSStudentsAssociation to view the latest campaigns and services we have running and see how you can get involved.

If there is an idea/issue or campaign that you think should be brought to the attention of the University to progress either UTS or tertiary education universally please contact us at students.association@uts.edu.au as we strive to put student voices at the forefront of UTS.

Thanks!

Your student reps,
Anna and Sabine