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University Council Summer 2026 Report

September marks a vibrant return to campus for the University of Saskatchewan, as we welcome returning and first-year students to a new academic journey. To kick off the year, the USSU hosted an array of Welcome Week events across the main campus. Recognizing the importance of connection, we also hosted low-barrier community events like Mahjong Night and the “Chalk the Campus” community mural project to help students meet new people before classes officially began. After Welcome Week, we transitioned to Academic Awareness Week, launching the 2026 Academic Awareness Handbook and connecting students with the campus resources they need to navigate their academic experience successfully.

Recognizing that the rising cost of living and education is a primary concern for students, the USSU dedicated the summer months to developing practical affordability solutions. We are incredibly proud to announce the launch of two major initiatives this September: uExchange and uSave. uExchange is a peer-to-peer textbook exchange platform designed to reduce the financial burden of course materials, while uSave is a new student discount program built in partnership with over 40 local businesses. Beyond these immediate solutions, the USSU has initiated conversations with other student unions to advocate for a provincial Open Educational Resources initiative. We are also collaborating with Student Finance and Awards to shift our financial support model toward needs-based aid and to develop a comprehensive crisis financial aid framework.

Student wellness, safety, and inclusion remain foundational to student success. Over the summer, the USSU made strides toward establishing a free Pro Bono Legal Clinic for students on campus and began advocating for increased access to low-sensory spaces in the University Library. Furthermore, all team members completed Sexual Violence Responder Training. The USSU also remains committed to Truth and Reconciliation and supporting our diverse campus community, proudly participating in events like Back to Batoche, Pride Parades in both Saskatoon and Prince Albert, and the Colours of Community flag raising.

Empowering our student communities was another major focus this summer. The USSU ratified nearly 100 campus groups, reflecting a strong, ongoing interest in student organizations. To support these groups, we published a new Campus Group Handbook and fully redesigned the USSUHub. This newly launched platform features a cleaner, more accessible layout for ratifications, funding requests, and room bookings, ensuring that student leaders have the tools they need to succeed. Meanwhile, direct student support remained a constant priority, with our team managing over 40 ongoing student cases and actively supporting students through university and college appeal hearings.

Effective advocacy is built on strong relationships and shared knowledge. Throughout the summer, our executive team engaged in meaningful dialogue with senior university leadership, including the Provost, COO, Vice President Research, and numerous Deans, as well as with provincial government representatives. In August, members of our executive travelled to Vancouver for the Student Union Development Summit (SUDS) at UBC, exchanging best practices and innovative ideas with student unions from across Canada.

At the beginning of September, our University Students' Council reconvened for the year. We are grateful for the opportunity to come together with student leaders from across the colleges to discuss priorities, review policies, and build collaboration for the fall term.

On behalf of the USSU and University of Saskatchewan students, we are grateful to share our priorities, initiatives, and reflections with the University Council, and we look forward to a collaborative and successful year ahead.

Reflections from VP Gonzalez Avila (she/her)



“July and August were months of preparation, connection, and community, focused on building momentum heading into the fall, finalizing Welcome Week plans, strengthening relationships with campus partners, and creating meaningful experiences for students before the year officially began.

On the advocacy front, I have continued exploring the possibility of implementing a more flexible tuition payment plan for students and connected with the relevant university staff to understand what options may be feasible.

Throughout the summer, I organized and attended several student-facing events. I organized a Mahjong Night as a fun, low-barrier way to bring students together and foster community connection ahead of the new year. I also led Chalk the Campus, a community mural chalk project that invited students to engage creatively with shared campus spaces. Both events reflect my commitment to building accessible, creative, community-centred programming.

For professional development, I attended the Alumo Summit to deepen my understanding of the health benefits available to students and completed Sexual Violence Responder Training, an important step in being better equipped to support students who may need that guidance.

September marked the beginning of the academic year. Welcome Week has come and gone, and it was a highlight of the term so far. After months of collaborative planning with the executive team and USSU Centres, we welcomed students back to campus through a series of events, including the USask Welcome Week, the Gordon Oakes Indigenous Student Welcome, the Residency Undergraduate Welcome, and the Prince Albert Campus Welcome. Connecting with students in those first days of the year was incredibly rewarding.

Following Welcome Week, I participated in Academic Awareness Week alongside the VP Academic Affairs and the broader team, an initiative focused on connecting students with the resources and information they need to navigate their academic experience successfully.

September also marked our first University Students' Council meeting, where we came together to discuss ongoing priorities, plan upcoming events, and continue building collaboration with USSU Centres as we move deeper into the fall term.

As the year is now fully underway, I look forward to continuing to develop programming and initiatives that foster inclusion, well-being, and a strong sense of belonging for all students.”

Reflections from VP Mendez Rosales (she/her)



“The Summer months have marked a second wave of growth in my role as VP Academic Affairs. Where May was about learning the systems and processes that support students, this summer has been about putting that foundation into action, expanding my presence across university committees/departments, and continuing to support students directly through casework, calls, and in-office meetings.

Academic Awareness Week was my top focus throughout the Summer, from early conversations about socials and programming with the marketing team to coordinating activities and finalizing the 2026 Academic Awareness Handbook. I have worked to bring in the Executive, Centres, and campus partners to help shape programming. Mid-September has marked the end of Academic Awareness Week; student turnout rates have been higher than expected. Overall, I am very proud of student engagement and the support from the departments tabling alongside myself.

uExchange progressed from an early proposal and website design discussions with the executive team to a finished product. My role for this initiative involved planning, coordinating logo design, website structure, and getting executive input over several weeks, and its completion represents one of the campaign goals I aimed to accomplish this term. At the moment, we are working to increase student engagement by using various social media platforms. A series of videos, posters, and flyers will be lined up to publish in late September and early October.

Direct student support has no start or end date, with over forty new student cases opened, along with numerous phone calls, emails, Zoom calls, and in-office meetings. I was also in attendance with students through multiple University Appeal Hearings and a College Hearing. On the engagement side, I remained active in the broader campus and Saskatoon community throughout the summer, participating in the Pride Parade in both Saskatoon and Prince Albert,

the Pride Flag Raise, Back to Batoche, the Community Mural project, Colours of the Community, and the USask Staff and Faculty Awards. I also supported content initiatives with the marketing team, including videos for Indigenous History Month and Men's Mental Health Month, and content supporting Undergraduate Research.

As the summer comes to a close, my focus shifts toward marketing the textbook exchange program, and maintaining the student casework and governance responsibilities that remain constant throughout the year. I look forward to reporting my progression on these outcomes in the coming months.”

Reflections from VP Vincent (he/him)



“The summer months were an active period for my portfolio, as work continued to build on the foundation set in May while preparing for a busy fall term.

Campus groups remained a major focus throughout June, July, and August. Close to 100 groups were ratified over the summer, reflecting strong ongoing interest in student organizations across campus. Alongside this, we finalized the Campus Group Handbook and published it to the website in late August. To help groups navigate the new academic year, I also put together a Campus Group Week Workshops package for the fall term.

This summer I also worked closely with our IT and Graphic Design team on a full redesign of the USSUHub, the platform campus groups use for ratification, funding requests, and bookings. The new HUB launched in late August with a cleaner, more accessible layout and a fresh look for every club using it, and the feedback from groups has been genuinely positive.

I also joined President Safaeian on the new uSave student discount partnership program. Over the summer, I reached out to a wide range of local restaurants, cafes, breweries, retailers, and recreation venues to negotiate student discounts and gather the branding needed for the program. uSave launched on September 1 with more than 30 partner discounts available to students. All Students need to do is show their USask Student ID card at checkout to receive a discount.

In August, I travelled to Vancouver to represent the USSU at the Student Union Development Summit (SUDS) at UBC, connecting with other Canadian student unions to

exchange ideas and best practices. As the fall term approached, I also took part in several orientation meetings and student welcome events, which were very exciting.

As the fall term begins, I look forward to continuing to support campus groups, growing the uSave program, and keeping our financial processes transparent and responsive to student needs.”

Reflections from President Safaeian (he/him)



“Students continue to face rising costs, growing uncertainty, and an increasingly complex university experience. During the past few months, the USSU focused on meeting these challenges with practical, student-centred solutions, while building the relationships needed to advocate effectively for students across campus and the province. My priorities this summer centred on affordability, student wellbeing, strong governance, and meaningful connection with university leadership and fellow student unions.

The cost of attending university remains a front-of-mind concern for students. Textbooks alone can place a significant burden on student budgets. In response, we developed uExchange, a textbook exchange platform that allows students to buy and sell used textbooks directly with one another. Throughout this period, I wrote the project proposal and worked closely with VP Ashley Mendez Rosales, the co-lead on the project; Scott Henderson, our IT manager; Meerah Abesia, graphics and media design; and our senior manager Jason Ventnor and Jason Kovitch on the website design, layout, copyright, branding, and marketing strategy. I am proud to share that uExchange is now complete and available to students, which went live at the beginning of September.

Alongside uExchange, we launched uSave, a student discount program designed to help students save money while shopping, whether that is for groceries or restaurants. Working with VP Elmer Vincent, co-lead on this project, we reached out to local businesses and secured more than 40 discount partners, including Paradox Pizza and Steep Hill Food Coop. Together, we built the uSave website and branding, and the program has now launched at the beginning of September. The USSU will continue to grow this list of partners throughout the year.

Longer term solutions to textbook costs are equally important. I have begun conversations with the student leaders of the University of Regina and Saskatchewan Polytechnic to advocate for a provincial Open Educational Resources initiative. Free and openly licensed

course materials would reduce costs for students across Saskatchewan, and a united provincial voice will strengthen this advocacy.

I am also working to ensure USSU financial support reaches the students who need it most. Recently, I began work to shift USSU financial help from a model based on academic achievement to one based on financial need. I also met with Alycia Cooper and Frank Kusch from Student Finance and Awards to develop a crisis financial aid framework, so that students facing sudden hardship have a clear path to support.

Over the past months, I also focused on student wellness and success, which depend on more than academics. Access to legal advice, sexual health services, and safe, supportive spaces all shape whether students can thrive at USask. During this time, I worked with David Stack towards establishing a new Pro Bono Clinic, which would give USask students free access to legal guidance. Finding a suitable space remains the key next step. I also met with the Dean of the University Library to discuss increasing access to low-sensory spaces for students and will continue advocating for more of these spaces across campus.

Alongside this work, I spoke with Ashley Dopko and Morgan Price about sexual violence awareness and prevention campaigns. I met with Jessica Fox and Beau Gallerneault to explore implementing the REES (Respect, Educate, Empower Survivors) platform at USask, which would give survivors a safe and confidential way to access support and reporting options. I also completed Sexual Violence Responder Training so that I am better prepared to support students who come forward.

Moreover, governance was one of my main focuses over the summer since representing students at the highest levels of university decision-making is one of the most important responsibilities of this role. This summer, I completed new board member orientation with Keith Martell, Kimberly Kroll Goodwin, and CFO Dee Henne, and attended the two-day Board of Governors meeting as well as the Audit and Finance Committee. Preparing for these meetings involved reviewing more than 650 pages of materials and ensuring the student perspective was informed and present in every discussion. I also attended the University Governance Committee and University Council, where I gave a speech on behalf of USSU.

Within the USSU, I worked to prepare our organization for a strong Council year. I coordinated interviews and the selection of the new USC Chairperson, and completed a comprehensive review of our bylaws and USC policies. I served on the Financial Appeals Review Committee and the Mistatimôk Committee. I also continued work on USSU land acknowledgement, which reflects our commitment to a welcoming and inclusive campus.

Additionally, I worked on building relationships since effective advocacy is built on strong relationships. In recent months, I met with senior university leaders, including Provost Patti McDougall, COO Greg Fowler, and Vice President for Research Dr. Baljit Singh. I reached

out to every dean and met with the Deans of Medicine, Kinesiology, Nursing, Education, the Edwards School of Business, and the University Library, as well as Dean Brooke Milne and Dean Debby Burshtyn. These conversations have opened the door to ongoing collaboration on student priorities in the colleges.

The USSU also held introductory meetings with campus partners who support students every day, including Access and Equity Services, the Student Wellness Centre, Student Central, Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre, Protective Services, Library Services, ISSAC, and University Apartments. Beyond campus, I travelled to Prince Albert to strengthen our connection with students at the USask Prince Albert campus.

Learning from other student unions has also been invaluable. I attended SUDS and Alumo Summit and connected with student union presidents from McGill, Concordia, the University of Toronto, Capilano University, UBC, SFU, Western and BCIT. Moreover, I also met with several former USSU presidents, whose advice has helped shape my approach to this role.

Additionally, Indigenous Engagement is one of our main focuses this year. The USSU remains committed to Truth and Reconciliation and to creating educational spaces for all students to learn about Indigenous histories. This summer, I was honoured to attend Back to Batoche with Ashley Mendez Rosales and Elmer Vincent, and to take part in an Indigenous History Month video. The USSU will continue working with Indigenous students and campus partners to advance initiatives.

Events and outreach were also a summer priority. Showing up for our community remained a priority throughout the summer. I attended Spring Convocation, the Prince Albert Pride Parade and Walk, the Pride flag raising, Colours of Community, and the Community Mural Project. To keep students informed and engaged, I worked with Meerah Abesia on regular social media content, including bursary and opt-in and opt-out videos, and contributed a written story and radio recording for Giving Day. Together with the executive, we also planned Welcome Week and swag to give incoming and returning students a warm start to the year.

The work of this summer has laid a strong foundation for the year ahead. This fall, I will focus on growing student use of uExchange and uSave, securing space for the Pro Bono Clinic, advancing the sexual health centre, and pushing forward a provincial Open Educational Resources initiative. I will also advocate for more bursaries, scholarships, emergency aid, and low-sensory rooms around campus. The USSU will continue to listen to students and advocate for a more affordable, accessible, and supportive University of Saskatchewan.”

Respectfully submitted,



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