Student Council Report

Name: Karthik Kumar Bonkur  
Position: President  
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Please find below a summary of the 2 main projects I have been working on since the last meeting of Student Council.

1. SPEED MEET – THE ICEBREAKER

Speed Meet, brings the students together on a social video-calling platform to spend some time together and increase the sense of belonging in the University.

Explanation:

Pandemic affected the living and well-being of every individual in the entire world. Due to lockdown, social distancing and several measures taken to curb the spread of COVID-19, loneliness has become the new normal which is subjecting individuals to other health issues. To satisfy the need for connection and sense of belonging, Speed Meet- The Icebreaker project brings everyone together on a social platform to get to know about each other and make acquaintances with those who have similar likes and dislikes. This is one of the ways to combat loneliness and the challenge the distance pandemic has created between us all.

Current status - I have discussed this idea with Quintin McKellar, Vice-Chancellor, UH, who is very supportive of the idea. I am lobbying for the implementation of this project with the concerned departments.

2. SAFEGUARDING STUDENT RIGHTS

International students are entitled to work for part-time during the term and full-time during vacation. Most of the students miss the opportunity to work full-time due to certain requirements.

Evidence: The requirement to aid the students in their part-time and full-time employability is brought to the notice of Quintin Mckellar, Vice-Chancellor, UH, Julie Kelly and Karen Omisore, from the Department of Academic Registry, UH.

Explanation:

International students are missing the opportunity to utilise their permit issued by UKVI to work full time during holidays, as they are required to present a letter from the University confirming the enrolment of the student and the university term calendar. Based on the feedback I received from the students, many queries requesting such letters were not answered or delayed. Outcome of which was lost opportunities despite the rights. I explained the Vice-Chancellor regarding the
situation, and I was supported in this regard. I received a disappointing response from the Department of Academic Registry, UH, as they stated that this is not a standard practice across the sector.

Current status - No Objection from Quintin Mckellar, Vice-Chancellor, UH, regarding the provision of letters confirming the enrolment, UKVI protocol for international students working permits and academic calendar. I will continue to lobby regarding the same with the Department of Academic Registry to offer support beyond the standard practice to support the students.

Representing the voice of the students, I Prioritise growth and development of the students, Student Union, UH, values the feedback and works above and beyond for the welfare of its students.

And below are some updates on 2 of the projects I mentioned at the last meeting of Student Council – please refer to my last report for background information on each one:

3. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT

- **Financial Support during Crisis**
  We are living in the times of Global Financial Crisis. Everyone together is working towards achieving a healthy community. I am working on student hardship fund to those acutely affected by COVID-19 pandemic. There is an increase in the number of queries regarding how the university could help students during the unprecedented times of uncertainty. I spent a lot of time lobbying Quintin and other staff in the university to offer support to students who need financial assistance for living or accommodation costs, technology to continue their online learning, financial capacity to ensure their next year of study. With regards to the Financial hardship fund, I raised the discussion with Vice-Chancellor again, but it was disappointing response as there was no supplementary hardship fund granted to international students in need. COVID-19 pandemic has mandated the change in the entire outlook of the world. We need current and future students to lead and shape the tomorrow. Hertfordshire University is always committed to support students but now it is time to go above and beyond the existing policies. I will continue to lobby regarding any further assistance students could have with respect to extreme financial crisis.

- **Improvising Language skills with Language workshops**
  With regards to Language Workshops project, I continued my efforts to lobby this concern to Quintin Mckellar, Vice-Chancellor, UH, who with much interest raised the issue in one of CEG meetings. I am happy to report the progress regarding the Language Workshops. Academic programme leaders from one of the schools have taken the initiative to build up an online resource with short videos and interactive tasks to support students. There is immense progress in drafting the resources and interactive elements. Once the content is finalised, I will collaborate with the programme leaders to take the sessions on live and assist the students to have one-to-one tutorials if needed.

- **Convenient Payment Plans**
  University co-ordinated and have taken into consideration, the feedback and concerns of the students and offered convenient payment plans to those who had 25% debt. After lobbying the
feedback and concerns with the Head of student finance, students who approached the student account management were provided with suitable payment plans to continue with their studies.

4. OFF-CAMPUS ACCOMMODATION ASSISTANCE

Quintin Mckellar, Vice-Chancellor, UH, forwarded the concern to the local MP, in the light of benefit for the students. There is no response from the local MP. I will continue to lobby regarding the concerns of the students with Quintin. I am working on Off-campus accommodation issues with regards to Guarantor requirement.

Further information about the work I do can be found here: https://hertfordshire.su/your-say/electedofficers/president/

And further information on Student Council can be found here: https://hertfordshire.su/your-say/student-council/

Thank you for reading!

Karthik Kumar Bonkur
President