

November Student Trustee Report

J. Serdetchnaia

STUDENT TRUSTEE REPORT

At this time, Student Trustee J. Serdetchnaia made the following remarks.

“Good evening, Mr. Chair, Mr. Director, Trustees, Staff, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to start off by apologizing for my absence at the October 25th Board meeting. I was attending the RBC/Shad Cup in Waterloo. The Shad Cup was the culmination and the product of the best summer of my life.

This past July, I took part in Shad Valley, a four-week science-entrepreneurship program for enriched high school students at twelve university campuses across Canada, including; McMaster, British Columbia, Calgary, Dalhousie and more. Shad Valley is a well-rounded program, featuring all sorts of activities, from university-style lectures to student-planned music nights to extreme athletics. The main objective is for participants to work in teams to create a business plan for an invented product that fits with the national theme, which was Zero-Waste this year. The RBC/Shad Cup is the competition among the twelve different campuses for the best product and the best business plan.

As amazing as the program was, the people I met and connected with really made my experience. I attended Shad Valley at the bilingual Université Laval in Québec City. Each campus hosts approximately fifty students from all across Canada. I was lucky to meet forty-nine of not only the most accomplished teens I have ever encountered, but also of the most outgoing. Among others, I met a seventeen-year-old professional cello player from Calgary Alberta, a girl from Victoria, British Columbia, who scored perfect on the SAT's and a regional champion all-star basketball player from Waterloo.

My fellow Shad Valley participants showed me how much more I have to strive for. I cannot emphasize enough what an eye opening experience a program like Shad Valley is. It is infinitely encouraging to meet other highly-motivated students. For many, it was an opportunity to realize that “I am not the only one”. Applications for the Shad Valley program are due in late December. I am encouraging as many of my peers as possible to apply so that they can benefit from a similar experience.

The weekend after the Shad Cup, Sepideh and I had the privilege of attending the Ontario Student Trustees' Association's Annual General Meeting in Toronto. The Executive of the Ontario Student Trustees' Association works hard to plan these meetings and facilitates conversation among student trustees from across the province. The weekend featured an intense set of workshops on education, plenty of socializing and exchanging of ideas, and of course, necessary coffee runs to Starbucks in order to maintain the energy level. We gladly welcomed former Ontario Education Minister Mr. Gerard Kennedy as the keynote speaker.

Attending the Annual General Meeting allowed Sepideh and I to gain a broader perspective of our role and what we can do with the influence given to us. We were able to identify similar problems that appear across many of the boards. One topic that was thoroughly discussed at the conference was the Student Senate, known here as the York Region Presidents' Council (YRPC), which consists of one representative from each high school's student council. While the YRPC is a great means of communication between school councils, there are many challenges to making it effective. For instance, attendance is currently an issue, with on average only thirteen of the thirty-one secondary schools coming regularly. The York Region Presidents' Council needs to establish its significance among schools. Rather than acting as a helpful aide, it is currently seen as just another responsibility.

Some proposals to increase the effectiveness of the York Region Presidents' Council include passing a policy that would make attendance mandatory and increasing involvement for schools that do attend. The objective of these two options would be to make school council members interested in attending as opposed to being obligated.

One positive way that the YRPC could be used is in the coordination of Region-wide events. For instance, Aurora High School recently held its first-ever 'No Brand Name Day'. Through the YRPC, I am hoping that we can transform 'No Brand Name Day' into a Region-wide event. Spirit days such as this target an ever-growing presence in schools, the brand name label. I have noticed that my high school seems to have an increasingly popular uniform of various brand name t-shirts, sweaters and jeans. A 'No Brand Name Day' creates the opportunity to promote awareness of teenage commercialization.

These kinds of initiatives can increase the efficiency of the YRPC and make it a crucial tool for York Region Student Councils.

Lastly, I would like to mention "The York Region Student Voice", of which we are currently preparing the third issue. The Student Voice newsletter is an opportunity for students to share success stories with their peers throughout the Region. The past two issues profiled "Food 4 Thought", a charity group at Newmarket High School, and a student from Pierre Elliott Trudeau High School who is preparing to travel to a developing country. Right now, copies of the newsletter are being distributed via high school principals. We are currently looking into ways of promoting it to make it more available to the student body. We welcome any and all ideas.

Thank you."