

# STUDENTS' COUNCIL LATE ADDITIONS

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Tuesday October 14th  
ETLC 1-008

## LATE ADDITIONS (SC 2014-12)

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| 2014-12/1  | <u>SPEAKER'S BUSINESS</u>  |
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| 2014-12/8a | Letter and answers regarding Agenda item 2014-12/5a<br>Please see document SC 14-12.01 |

October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014

**To:** Students' Council

**Re:** Letter and answers regarding Agenda item 2014-12/5a

Dear Students' Council,

It turns out I am able to attend this meeting! Regardless, I'll still answer the questions that I received regarding motion 2014-12/5a. But first, a preamble:

The reason the executives called for this additional meeting is due to the timelines we are presented with. The Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education has set a deadline of October 15<sup>th</sup> for when all proposals for market modifiers must be submitted. By default, this deadline also applies to any Student Representative Associations (SRAs) who are in the process of consulting students.

The Law Students' Association (LSA) very recently conducted a survey among their student body and the LSA President wishes to bring these results to Council. Essentially, the motion currently states that Council will allow the LSA to advocate against our Tuition political policy. This is important, since our current Bylaw 8100 states that all Faculty Associations must not advocate contrary to the SU's political stances, which have been debated and ratified by Students' Council.

This is certainly a nuanced discussion! Personally, I do not see the value in market modifiers. On behalf of the Students' Union as well as the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS), I can say that students disapprove of market modifiers as a policy tool, since they are differential tuition increases applied arbitrarily.

However, at the University of Alberta, the Students' Union has recognized that a particular group of students may have strong and different opinions. Students have my utmost sympathy regarding the fact that they need more funding for their programs. We all do! Yet, I am adamant that students should not continue to bear the burden of funding shortfalls from the government.

In my view, Council has decided that in order to deal with this situation of contradicting student views, the students in question should be given the opportunity to voice their opinions in a transparent manner. The least we can do in this situation is to allow law students and their representatives, the LSA, the ability to legitimately bring their concerns and requests to government. At the same time, in my role as Vice President External and Chair of CAUS, I will without a doubt continue to advocate against market modifiers.

The idea of market modifiers goes against the principles that underlie our vision for postsecondary education in Alberta. If we truly want an accessible, affordable, predictable, and high quality education, we deserve a stronger and more stable funding mechanism for our institutions and prospective and current students.

That said, below are the questions I received from Councillor Zhang and my answers:

**[1]. Have you been given any information or the chance to review any of the material that will be presented on Tuesday? If yes, what is your impression? More specifically, do you feel like an adequate consultation process has been conducted?**

No, the Executives have not seen the survey results. I became aware of the survey results through President Lau who had been informed by the LSA President.

Myself, President Lau, and VP Orydzuk were consulted in the creation of the survey questions. Yet I am aware that these questions are not completely neutral but we had to compromise, since the final wording of the questions was up to the LSA executive. Nevertheless, the process used by the LSA has been more open and consultative than in other faculties. Given the various constraints, I think the LSA consulted their student body in an acceptable manner. Ideally, I prefer a plebiscite to a survey for a number of reasons. Mainly, a plebiscite allows for both “yes” and “no” campaigns to occur, whereby each side actively tries to convince students one way or the other. There is equal opportunity to disseminate multiple perspectives as well as the opportunity to ask additional questions. However, I believe the LSA had their reasons for conducting a survey, among them the desire to ask multiple questions to receive feedback on a number of issues.

**[2]. With the information you do have, what is your current stance on the Law Faculty proposal for market modifier, do you support it? What are the specific reasons for your position?**

My position to the provincial government is that market modifiers in general are poor policy, especially in the context of budget cuts and Responsibility Centered Management being introduced at the University of Alberta. Through this tool, students will continue to bear the burden of increasing costs (due to inadequate funding) of postsecondary education.

However, in this specific instance, the Students’ Union recognizes that the majority of law students are willing to cover these costs, if their additional conditions are also met. It’s important to note that law students are in favour of the tuition increase, *if* they receive the services and benefits outlined in the survey. Due to the process the Executives and Council have outlined over the past month, I recognize their opinion and I understand the LSA’s position.

**[3]. In your opinion, how do you think council should vote? how do you think council will vote?**

I have no opinion on how Council *should* vote, as that would be inappropriate. Together, we have to balance our need for good process and strong advocacy. Council has a couple options though. On the one hand, seeing as the law students support a market modifier (with conditions), Council can allow the LSA to contravene bylaw and advocate against our political policy by them writing a letter of support. This will essentially mean, “we agree to disagree”.

If Council chooses to not allow the LSA to write their letter of support (and then if they do write it, it means Council does not legitimately recognize it), we have to consider the following question: if a SRA follows our asks and seek our approval, what *is* the threshold where we give that approval?

Council must also decide if allowing the LSA to contravene our bylaw and political policy means that

Council supports their letter of support and the Faculty of Law's proposal to the government. If this is not the case, I suggest Council make this clear, perhaps through an amendment to the motion.

I cannot predict how Council will vote.

**[4]. Does allowing this presentation contradict council's previous decision to define adequate consultation as a plebiscite or a referendum? This was previously defined at a council meeting and decided that an SRA cannot present unless they've done the above.**

The spirit of requesting a plebiscite or referendum is that every student in the faculty should have a chance to voice their concerns and have their vote counted. A survey can achieve a similar result, though in a different structure. I agree that it may not be as rigorous, but I believe it is good enough given the circumstances, especially considering we made that motion after the LSA had already written their letter of support. On the one hand, the LSA is coming back to Council after we have set a standard; on the other, the overall issue with the LSA pre-dates the motion we made about SRAs.

The LSA has demonstrated that their opinion is based off of how students in their faculty feel, and we should respect the lengths they have gone to given the shifting timelines from both administration and government. Council will have to consider whether or not it is satisfied with the survey questions and what the results show us.

**[5]. Is there anything that you feel like council should be aware of regarding market modifiers and or any other issues?**

I feel as though Council has all the information necessary to understand the context that we are working in. It is fragile, multifaceted, and has many layers. I trust that Council will use its judgment to make the best decision for students at the University of Alberta, keeping in mind our core advocacy principles of accessibility, affordability, predictability, and accountability.

Sincerely,



**Navneet Khinda**

Vice President External 2014-2015 // [University of Alberta Students' Union](#)  
Chair // [Council of Alberta University Students](#)

**Phone:** (780) 492-4236 // **E:** [vp.external@su.ualberta.ca](mailto:vp.external@su.ualberta.ca)

**Twitter:** [@uasuvpexternal](https://twitter.com/uasuvpexternal)