Sophia Aitken's VP Student Affairs Platform
From Available to Accessible – Bridging the Resource Gap

Opening Statement

Too often, the resources available to students are hidden behind bureaucracy, misinformation, or a lack of awareness. My goal is to bridge the gap between what is offered and what is genuinely accessible, ensuring that every student knows, understands, and can effectively use the support in place for their success.

PILLAR 1: Resource Accessibility

Why This Matters:

Students face unnecessary barriers to accessing career services, academic advising, and learning resources. Many are unaware of what is available or struggle with inefficient systems that make seeking help overwhelming. My plan will make resources easier to find, more transparent, and student-friendly.

Action Plan:

Streamlining Career Resources:

- With full support from the Director of Careers, introduce a QR Code system or a Brightspace page consolidating all career resources in one place.
    - This includes centralized access to career-building tools, including job boards (Huron Connect), the handbook, resume workshops, and mock interviews that the Career Development Department offers. Additionally, have access to "How to Videos" and FAQs.
    - Additionally, highlight student success stories to promote engagement with career services, from how they got an internship to what resources they have benefited from.
- Transparency in Academic and Career Pathways:
    - Enhance the visibility of academic work-integrated learning experiences.
    - Promote entrepreneurial funding for student-led business ideas.
    - Work with faculty to promote Research Assistant positions through the Career Development Department.
- "Careers Week"
    - With full support from the Director of Careers, establish a "Careers Week" in the first semester to promote and introduce the resources the Career Development Department offers, from LinkedIn support to drop-in mock interview prep.
    - Build off of the alumni and faculty connections to host a more degree-inclusive Career Panel to highlight the diverse career paths students can have.

<u>Revamping Academic Advising:</u>
- Update the academic handbook with clear degree requirement tracking.
  - Have a template of a degree requirement tracking table and examples, ie. BMOS and a double major with honours specializations
- Working with the USC's VP University Affairs to get MyDegree brought to Western. Unlike Draft My Schedule it tracks and shows outstanding degree requirements.

<u>Library and Learning Services:</u>
- Adding a Library Ambassador to the VPSA portfolio under or in conjunction with the Academic commissioner to act as a student liaison and advocate for student needs.
  - The Library Ambassador will be able to promote library resources to first-year students and work with clubs and Faculty Reps to host tutoring events.
  - The Library Ambassador would also work closely with the Director of Library and Learning Services and be a needed student voice on the Library Committee.

PILLAR 2: Wellness and Safety
Why This Matters:
Mental health is one of the most pressing issues facing students today. The increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and academic burnout highlight the need for proactive, student-centred wellness initiatives. We must ensure that students can navigate their academic experience with the necessary support without stigma or unnecessary barriers.

Action Plan:
<u>BIGGEST GOAL: Mandating Content Warnings on Syllabi:</u>
- Advocate for a universal content warning system similar to those implemented at Waterloo and Brock and other U.S. and U.K. institutions.
  - Professors would provide advanced notice on syllabi or course platforms when upcoming material includes sensitive topics such as gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV), racism, homophobia and transphobia, religious violence, genocide, residential schools, mental health and addiction, and general violence.
  - This allows students to plan by reaching out to their professors, accessing wellness support, or, in extreme cases, reconsidering course enrollment. Tools like stepping out of the classroom are not always beneficial due to the public nature of leaving in front of peers, I will also advocate for changes in participation requirements.
    - This initiative is not about censorship; rather, it ensures students can engage with course content in a way that protects their mental well-being while being able to engage with important subject matter.

<u>Clarity on the Huron Early Alert Team (HEART):</u>
- Develop a universal pamphlet outlining how HEART functions, who is involved, and how student confidentiality is maintained.
  - While confidentiality is crucial, students referred to HEART should have access to clear information about its purpose and process.
  - Encourage transparency among HEART members so they can confidently explain their role without violating confidentiality protocols.

<u>Destigmatizing Help-Seeking Behavior by Breaking Barriers:</u>
- Work with the Head International Student Orientation (ISO) to present help-seeking as a tool for success rather than a reflection of failure, particularly for international students who may face additional cultural or systemic barriers.
  - Connect international students with international Academic Advisors during International Week before the school year commences.
  - Inform international students with a more personalized HUCSC about the role of the international representative as well as the many ways in which HUSCS is here to support them.
- With the full support of the Director of Wellness Services, the hiring process for Wellness Peer Educators will be changed to include student voices.
  - The new hiring panel will include the Director of Wellness Services, a past Wellness Peer Educator, and a member of the student community who has engaged in resources in the past.
  - The VPSA will be there to assist the Director of Wellness Services in doing a call out to the student body to get volunteers to be on the hiring committee.

<u>Improving Reporting Systems for Students:</u>
- Huron, through the Community Safety Office, provides in-person and online reporting, with the current option of anonymous reporting for the latter. As VPSA, I want to raise awareness about reporting mechanisms, as only 20% of incidents currently get formally reported by:
  - Hosting an educational campaign on methods to report with support from the Community Safety Office through in-person booting and social media.
  - Addressing barriers that make it difficult to report student leaders and other areas with power imbalances that prevent students from coming forward.
  - Implementing measures to reduce the fear of repercussions when reporting misconduct.
  - Revising reporting structures to prevent retraumatization and streamline support for students who come forward.

PILLAR 3: Equity, Inclusion, and Advocacy
Why This Matters:
Many students, especially international, Indigenous, off-campus, and mature students, face unique challenges that require better representation and institutional support. Huron must be held accountable to ensure its policies reflect the diverse needs of its student body.

Action Plan:
Strengthening Representation:
- Enhance the ability for advocacy and support through General Assembly (GA) Demographic reps.
  - Work with the Speaker, VP Finance, and VP Events to be able to host coffee chats to connect students with their respective demographic reps using the social events budget line to create a direct advocacy line.
  - Utilize platforms like International Week and Off-Campus Orientation for targeted engagement by bringing awareness to what demographic reps do.
  - Translate the feedback demographic reps receive through enhanced connection and visibility to translate it into actionable steps.

Enhancing Student Government Transparency:
- Improve outreach so that students know who their VPSA portfolio commissioners and associates are so they know who to go to with issues or ideas.
- Work with the VP Communications to update the website with clear descriptions of VPSA roles and responsibilities.
- Host interactive "HUCSC 101" sessions beyond O-Week to introduce first-years to student leadership opportunities by working with the Don team to host a Q&A event.
  - This will not only help the HUCSC to feel approachable for first-year students to join but also help educate first-year students on all the ways the HUCSC is here to support them.

Serving Diverse Student Populations:
- Establish a pilot program for more drop-in focus groups and conversation circles to address feedback gaps, as the current system survey does not allow for continued space for feedback.
  - Host a focus group specifically for international students, as the past BIPOC student survey did not represent the unique needs of international students and not all international students identify as BIPOC.
- Balanced support for cultural clubs and pride clubs while respecting their autonomy by providing an ongoing line of communication and presence at events.
- Include safe spaces and authentic representation for Trans and Non-Binary Folks and ensure Indigenous students have dedicated services and culturally relevant support.

<u>Upholding Financial Transparency Under Bill 166:</u>
- Hold Huron accountable for providing clear, timely information on tuition, fees, and textbook costs.
- Ensure students are protected from sudden financial aid or work-study changes.

<u>Menstrual Equity:</u>
- Expand access to menstrual hygiene products in all bathrooms.
    - Menstrual equity ensures that all students, regardless of gender identity or bathroom accessibility, have access to essential hygiene products, reducing stigma and preventing financial and logistical barriers to menstrual care.
    - Providing free menstrual products in all bathrooms supports inclusivity, dignity, and overall student well-being.
- Partner with the USC to get free the dot. brought to Huron.

PILLAR 4: Sustainability
Why This Matters:
A sustainable campus benefits both students and the broader community. While environmental literacy is growing, there is still a need to ensure students have the knowledge and resources to make eco-conscious choices.

Action Plan:
<u>Enhancing Sustainability Literacy:</u>
- Implement awareness campaigns to promote responsible consumption and waste reduction.
    - Educate off-campus students on how to recycle and compost in their student housing by hosting a booth to provide resources on how to recycle and compost in their housing zones.
    - Provide clear guidance on dining hall composting to reduce food waste by having signage on what is compostable.
    - Promote the existing trash can for items like jam packages.
        - Counterintervally, increasing the number of accessible trash cans in the dining hall will lead to more food waste as it defeats the point of a centralized compost. Offering clarification that items like fry wrappers and tea bags are compostable is more sustainable.

Closing Statement
Students should not have to struggle to find or access the resources meant to support them. My campaign is about **bridging the gap between availability and accessibility**, ensuring that all students have the tools they need to thrive. Together, we can build a more transparent, inclusive, and supportive campus community.