

Compass

A new direction for the UTSU

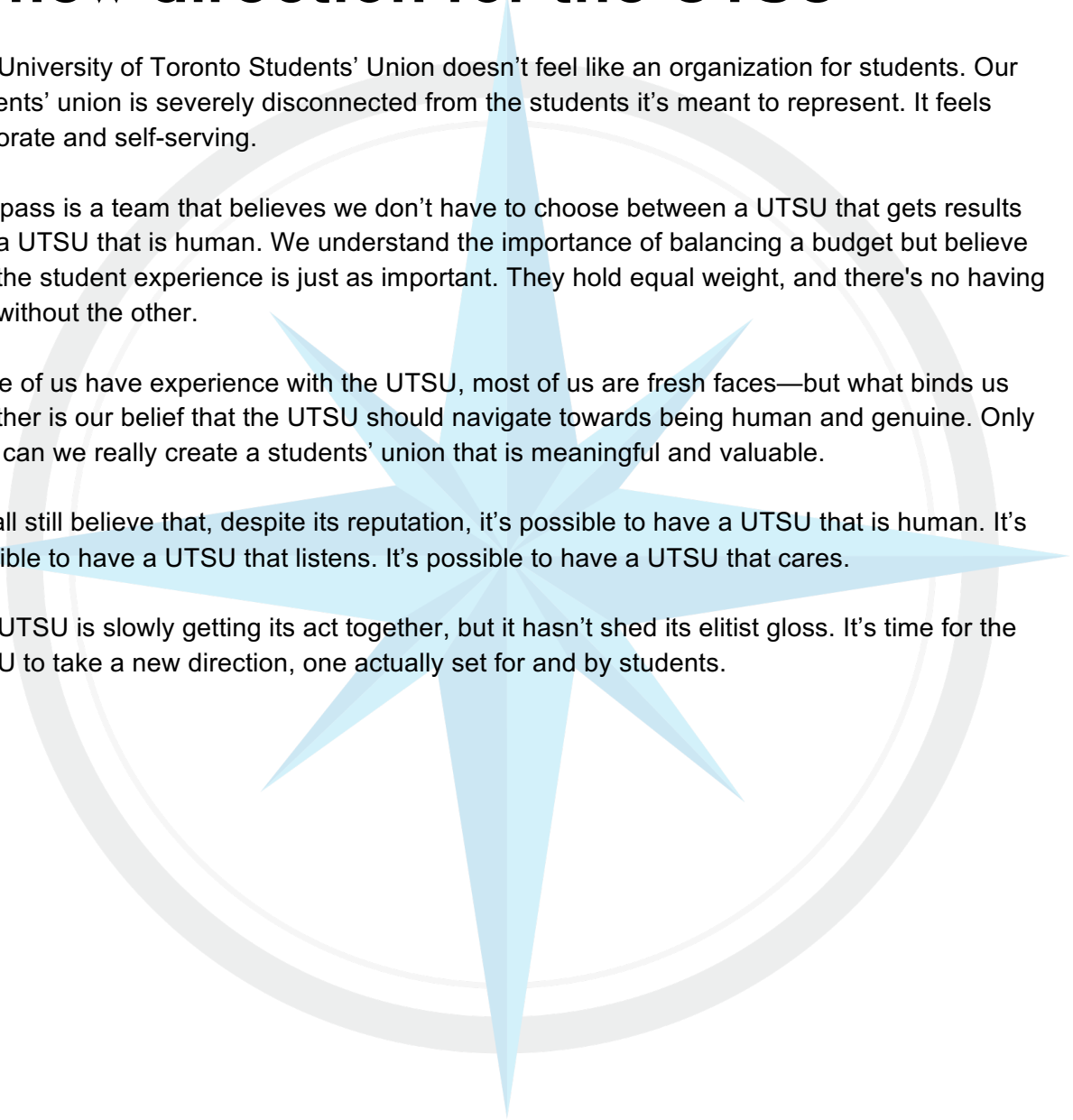
The University of Toronto Students' Union doesn't feel like an organization for students. Our students' union is severely disconnected from the students it's meant to represent. It feels corporate and self-serving.

Compass is a team that believes we don't have to choose between a UTSU that gets results and a UTSU that is human. We understand the importance of balancing a budget but believe that the student experience is just as important. They hold equal weight, and there's no having one without the other.

Some of us have experience with the UTSU, most of us are fresh faces—but what binds us together is our belief that the UTSU should navigate towards being human and genuine. Only then can we really create a students' union that is meaningful and valuable.

We all still believe that, despite its reputation, it's possible to have a UTSU that is human. It's possible to have a UTSU that listens. It's possible to have a UTSU that cares.

The UTSU is slowly getting its act together, but it hasn't shed its elitist gloss. It's time for the UTSU to take a new direction, one actually set for and by students.



A new direction for Operations

Revamp Clubs Funding

towards a more vibrant campus life

Clubs are the foundation of campus life at the University of Toronto. And while the UTSU plays a key role in supporting the clubs community, its level funding system is rigid, bureaucratic, and out of date. It rewards established clubs that know how to play by its rules, and punishes rising stars who are unfamiliar.

Our campus deserves a funding system that works for all clubs. We'll move from the current level funding system to a more discretionary funding system. We'll take a look at all the work a club does over the year and distribute funding based on the work the club does and not just on how engaged the clubs are with the UTSU.

Rebuild Student Aid

towards an open system of financial support

The UTSU grossly underspends on student aid. Only \$20,000 dollars are allocated from its discretionary budget to its financial aid programs, and every award is capped at a measly \$100. Our students' union should be doing far more to support students with financial need.

The UTSU knows that, but still conceals its shortfalls in intentionally arcane budgetary publications. For poor reasons, both the Student Refugee program and the Dollars for Daycare levy are listed as expenses for its student aid program—padding numbers that would, and should, raise eyebrows otherwise. As if that wasn't enough, a look at the actuals of the UTSU's budget shows that nearly half of allocated funding goes unclaimed. We'll rebuild the student aid program by widening access to the application. We'll get rid of unnecessarily strict requirements, merge separate bursaries to simplify and increase the visibility of the program, and broaden the categories of eligible need. Most importantly, we'll also allocate more funding to the student aid program.

Slash Limits on Contraceptives

towards safer sex

The UTSU's Health and Dental Plan currently contains a reduced claims limit on oral contraceptives that is separate from the limit on other prescription drugs. While students can claim up to a maximum of \$2000 for prescription drugs, they can only claim a maximum of \$200 for oral contraceptives. The policy is outdated and has little to no grounding in the health plan's financing demands. Students deserve fair access to oral contraceptives and other safe sex products. We'll remove the reduced limit.

Develop Online Petitions for UTSU Referenda towards a more politically accessible UTSU

There are crucial flaws in the UTSU's referenda processes. They are cumbersome and built around an existing familiarity with the UTSU's function—effectively reserving the tools to political change on campus for political insiders. We'll implement an online platform for students to petition for referendum under the UTSU's Charter for Referenda. That way, we can level the political playing field.

Introduce Professional Faculty Career Services towards an abundance of practical opportunity

Professional faculty students' career opportunities can seem rigidly predetermined. Standard career tracks are a source of comfort for some, but a source of anxiety for others. We intend to organize career development resource fairs that aim to help all professional faculty students -- regardless of their specific faculty or their confidence in their career path. By providing headshots, interview prep toolkits, and resume editing services that are tailored to the unique needs of the various professional faculties, these will serve to augment professional faculty students' career opportunities, and offer a source of guidance to students that seek it.

Expand the Free Menstrual Product Program towards free access to necessities

Last year, the UTSU started a free menstrual product pilot project. The project, which runs out of the UTSU office, allows students to discreetly pick up free menstrual products. With the transition to the Student Commons, we'll turn this into a formal service of the UTSU and give the project the infrastructure it needs to adequately meet the demand from students.

Ensure a Successful Transition into the Student Commons towards a positive and viable future for the Student Commons

This year, the UTSU published financial projections and updated financial projections for the Student Commons set to open in September of 2018. There is a plan put forward to avoid bankruptcy. Moving forward, it's important that the UTSU commits to this financially viable plan for itself and for the Student Commons. However, it's also important that the U of T's only student center is a place that feels like one.

The first year in the Student Commons will set the tone for years to come. We want to foster a culture built around community and a sense of welcome. As much as the UTSU has recently concentrated on the financial aspect of the building, we recognize that the building will exist to benefit students and student life more generally.

Allocate 50% of Student Commons HR Costs to Student Jobs towards a UTSU that gives back to working students

With the opening of the Student Commons, the UTSU will see a drastic increase in human resources costs. We see this burden as a resource in itself. While some of the jobs introduced by the building will be specialized and high-skill, many will demand qualifications consistent with those of students

A considerable portion of the student body supports itself on the wages of part-time work. The UTSU is in a unique position to offer opportunities to these students that they wouldn't otherwise have--jobs that provide a means of support for their financial needs, and that integrate well with their academic lives. We'll make sure that when filling new jobs in the Student Commons, the UTSU prioritizes its members.

Publish a transparent, digestible budget towards an accountable finance process

It's nearly impossible for the average student to make sense of the UTSU's budget. From the format of the budget to the names of individual line items, it's clear that the budget isn't intended to be widely read, which is the complete opposite of what an open and accessible student union should strive for.

We'll produce a transparent and digestible budget, presented in a way that is readable to all. Having a clear budget will give students insight into the UTSU's operations and priorities. It also reassures students that funds aren't being misspent. We'll also produce a written breakdown of the budget and explain how and why we're spending students' money in the way that we are.

Restructure Board Function towards a board that enforces accountability and engineers its own initiative

The UTSU doesn't currently work the way it should. Executives hold all the power, and directors exist as parties to their programs and agendas. Given a capable executive, this is not an overriding problem, but simple faith in a stroke of luck is not a legitimate system of function for the UTSU.

The UTSU's executive-director relationship needs work. Power needs to be shifted so that an appropriate balance is struck--one where executives can pursue initiatives freely, but where directors have license to check abuse where they see it. We will pursue this rebalancing by altering the roles of executives in board meetings and committees. Additionally, we want to introduce a culture in the board that encourages greater director engagement. We will do this by giving directors more tools to apply their ideas and pursue independent initiatives.

Implement a Transparent Governance Processes towards a UTSU that opens itself to the community

The UTSU doesn't do enough to inform its members on regular happenings in its governance process. Although minutes and agendas for meetings are made public, minutes for committee meetings aren't made public until the subsequent Board meeting. These minutes often contain substantial motions, and members have a right to know about the business of these committees as soon as it happens.

We'll introduce a requirement that committee minutes are published within 72 hours from the end of the meeting. We'll also do more to advertise when and where these committee and Board meetings happen so that students are able to engage and participate.



A new direction for Advocacy

Seek a Complete Approach to Reconciliation

towards a sincere path to reconciliation

The University of Toronto has consistently peddled its rhetoric of reconciliation, but failed to uphold the recommendations of its own Truth and Reconciliation Steering Committee. We are actively committed to upholding the recommendations of the steering committee, as our university should be accessible to all Treaty peoples, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Article 48(ii) of the TRC indicates that spaces should be created to respect “Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination in spiritual matters, including the right to practise, develop, and teach their own spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies.” This should extend to places of residence and classrooms, wherein a cultural approach to learning will be fostered. We will also implement the recommendations of the commission in the development and operation of the Student Commons.

Support a Vote to Leave the Canadian Federation of Students

towards an independent campus

The Canadian Federation of Students doesn’t deserve the support of students at the University of Toronto. For a long time, the CFS has operated in a secretive and inaccessible manner. From secret bank accounts, to meetings that systematically shut out dissent, the federation has a long history of not being open to students. Students have started the process of leaving the federation, and the UTSU has supported it. We’ll continue this support and when it comes to it, we’ll support a vote to leave the CFS.

Lobby for Improved Student Access to Transit

towards a student-friendly transit system

At a commuter school as large as UofT, tens of thousands of students rely on effective transit to complete their education. In 2017, the federal government eliminated the 15% non-refundable tax credit applied to weekly and monthly transit passes. The government should be doing more, not less, to make public transit affordable.

We’ll lobby the federal government to re-introduce the credit for post-secondary students. We’ll also lobby the provincial government for increased funding to the TTC and Metrolinx.

Ensure Second-Entry Professional Faculty Student Access to UofT Facilities

towards fully accessible university resources

The UTSU represents ten professional faculties, and five of which are for second entry programs. In addition to having different admission requirements from first entry profac students, second entry profac students also have academic sessions that frequently don't align with the undergraduate Arts and Sciences calendar the way that other profac calendars usually do. This has the consequence that U of T facilities and access systems tailored to undergraduate students have significant gaps in their availability to second entry profac students, leaving them unable to fully benefit from facilities they have paid for.

We want to ensure that second entry professional faculty students have regular access to the facilities and services they pay for throughout the entirety of their academic sessions. In certain unique circumstances, I want to secure appropriate alternatives to these facilities where needed.

Lobby for Improved Student Housing Laws towards a housing situation that students can negotiate

Students at the University of Toronto face one of the toughest housing markets in Canada. Students have strict budgets and few options when it comes to housing in the city. Under these restrictions, students frequently have their rights as tenants violated--and in far too frequent cases, without even knowing it.

We'll lobby the municipal government for housing laws that better account for post-secondary students. In particular, we're going to push for laws that protect students from unfair termination, and serious and dangerous living conditions.

Develop Students Rights resources for international students towards the recognition of international student rights

International students are especially susceptible to having their rights breached as tenants and employees. The first step in addressing this issue is to make sure that students, especially international students, are aware of their rights.

We're going to develop toolkits and resources that help international students, especially incoming first year students, understand their housing and employment rights and the protections and services available when those rights are violated.

Conduct an Equity Audit of Campus towards a concrete basis for effective equity advocacy

Different departments have very different priorities and have the autonomy to implement them as they see fit. This results in an uneven field of equity issues on campus, with some departments being far less equitable than others. Furthermore, students face significant challenges in having their equitable concerns heard by the university without concrete backing for their experiences.

We will conduct an audit of campus departments and services to see where the biggest gaps lie. Specifically, we will examine the percentage of tenured faculty, the percentage of marginalized faculty members, the integration of syllabus material from marginalized groups, and complaint processes for voicing concerns. We will use this information to lobby for policy changes and implementation, and to raise awareness of which departments require the most change.

Conduct a ProFac Mental Health Audit and Lobby Accordingly towards professional faculties that value mental wellness

Students in professional faculties are assigned rigorous class schedules, work under demanding expectations, and in some cases shoulder the burden of fitting into their program's narrow career future. All of these have direct impacts on students' mental health, as well as their ability and availability to take advantage of Health & Wellness services at U of T. Needless to say, the condition of students' mental health in professional faculties is getting worse and worse.

We are going to survey students themselves, and not the faculty administration. By making that distinction and focusing on students, their needs, and their experiences--as opposed to the services faculties provide--we can create a solid foundation for understanding the realities of students' mental health concerns as they relate to their various programs and faculties. Following that, the next step is to present the results to relevant elements of the administration, and to lobby for embedded mental health services that are specialized to the needs of profac students.

Lobby for Mandatory Sexual Violence Training towards a safer campus

In 2016, the provincial government passed legislation that required all post-secondary institutions to have policies on sexual violence prevention and response on campus. The University of Toronto introduced their policy over the last two years. The university has also developed an online training module intended to train students on concepts of consent and active prevention of sexual violence on campus. The portal teaches students about concepts of consent and how to actively prevent sexual violence on campus. Unfortunately, the policy is only voluntary, and is hidden in the depths of Blackboard. For any policy like this to have a meaningful impact on the safety of students and their education, the training must be mandatory and well-advertised.

We'll push the university to make this training mandatory for all students.

Organize a Pass the Mic Campaign towards a celebration of our diverse student population

Recognizing the success of marginalized communities and creating spaces for them to share their stories is extremely important. Through the Pass the Mic Campaign, we aspire to create more representation for marginalized students through a creative lens. We look towards celebrating the unique identity and

culture of individuals and communities by collaborating with them and curating programming and events that are artistic in nature, to aid in their self-expression. More importantly this campaign will let student leaders from their specific communities, be able to bring out their own culture and identity to the forefront instead of making them act as passive observers.

Fighting Against Unfair University Policies

towards the defense of vulnerable students against the university

Over the past year, the administration has been trying to implement their new Mandated Leave Policy--to hard opposition from student leaders. The policy aims to more clearly codify the language of the Student Code of Conduct, but its underlying effect is clear: the university is trying to remove its most vulnerable students from campus.

We will actively campaign against any new variations of this policy as long as the involuntary aspect remains. We want students to be at the center of these discussions with proper representation, so that they can make the decision that's best suited for their individual needs. Additionally, we will work to ensure that students on temporary leave have continued access to various services across campus. Similarly, we will advocate for changes in the verification of illness process, allowing more flexibility in how students can confidentially demonstrate their condition. We will work to allow the registrars to act as a neutral third party in the submission of these requests, removing professors' unlimited discretion in dealing with these cases.

Advocate for Grade Forgiveness Policies

towards empathy in academic life

Many of our students want to take risks with their courses, but the fear of not doing well acts as a major deterrent. With our grades set down permanently on our transcripts and the pressure to do well, our students limit themselves to courses in which they know they can succeed. With the current CR/NCR policy, students are left deciding their fate in a course well before the final exam--but as we know, a lot can go wrong after these deadlines pass.

We want to work with administration to implement a fair grade forgiveness policy across various faculties, so students would not be consistently penalized for taking these risks and experiencing academic hardship. This policy would allow for the removal of a course from an academic transcript upon receipt of the final grade (for a limited number of FCEs), so the student can express their say in whether it was an accurate demonstration of who they are as a student.

Push for Extended Mental Health Care under Health and Wellness

towards a mental health system that works

Health and Wellness is chronically underfunded and understaffed. Students seeking support for mental health issues on campus face long wait times and little support. The university doesn't provide much in terms of long-term care, and even implements a maximum number of

appointments a student can make at health and wellness for mental health treatment. The university should do more to support students who are exiting the health and wellness system and helping them transition to community resources.

We want to ensure the university has adequate exit policies for students in health and wellness, allowing students to continue having access to services until the university can match them with an external service for more long-term care.

Lobby to count PEY and Co-op towards the Canadian Experience Class Immigration Program

towards a Canada that embraces its international students

International students wishing to gain permanent residency in Canada must do so by applying through the Canadian Experience Class immigration program. However, students are only eligible for this program with at least 1 year of skilled work experience, *after* graduation. Most importantly, any work experience while you are a full-time student, including co-ops and PEY, does not count toward the program. While the program seems like it's designed to help those with experience working and living in Canada to gain a permanent residency, the restrictions on co-op and similar work for full-time students undermine the legitimacy of that work experience.

We will lobby the government to allow skilled work done by full-time students doing PEY and co-op programs to count for the Canadian Experience Class program, and help international students who have started a new chapter of their lives in Canada continue that chapter if they so choose.