

COMMUNITY | SUSTAINABILITY | TRANSPARENCY

Marek

**FOR
SOCIAL SCIENCE
COUNCILLOR**

PLATFORM DOC

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I, Marek Brooking, acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum.

Therefore, I respect the historical relationship that indigenous nations have to the land that is today Western University. I also acknowledge both the historical and ongoing injustices that indigenous peoples endure in both Canada and abroad, and as a public figure acknowledge that it is my duty to contribute toward advancing reconciliation as well as educating people on indigenous issues.

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WHO AM I?

My name is Marek Brooking and I am a 3rd year political science student running to be one of your next councillors for Social Science.

Growing up in a small town near Sudbury has profoundly shaped who I am and what I believe in. I loved playing soccer and hockey just like any other kid in Northern Ontario, but even as a child, I could not ignore how politics could impact people's lives and how things could change for better or worse. **I have seen many of my friends become victims of faulty policy-making, often to the benefit of their more fortunate peers.** From then on, I was dedicated to making sure that I not only educate myself on political issues, but ensure that changes are always made to the benefit of the community.

The main reason I am running is to give back to a community that has given so much to me - friends, a loving partner, and overall an amazing experience I would not have gotten anywhere else. I would like to make an impact on the university that I call home, particularly when it comes to addressing the pervasive issues I have seen in the three years I have been here. I simply cannot stand by as these issues continue to be ignored at the expense of students. I believe it is time to take action - and I am more than ready to tackle whatever challenge may come my way.

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MY VISION FOR THE USC

My vision for the USC consists of three pillars; Community, Sustainability, and Transparency. **All of them attempt to address a massive issue within the USC - that it acts more like a corporation than an organization meant to put the improvement of the student experience first.** I have seen many students on campus struggle to pay for basic needs such as food, especially as the cost of living continues to rise nationally. Students also feel that the USC is not doing enough in terms of sustainability initiatives, and demand bold steps to be taken on them. Finally, they want a USC that keeps the general public informed on what is going on within Council and makes it easier for them to understand the politics of the institution. All of these ensure that the USC is a place that everyone can be a part of.

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PILLAR I. COMMUNITY

Growing up, I saw much of my community rely on support from others in order to stay afloat. For many of those who were more fortunate, the main priority was ensuring that those struggling got what they needed, not just as a measure of mere kindness but rather one of community, where everyone looks out for one another because of the home they share.

This is the philosophy that I believe the USC should adopt. **Our community should be actively supporting one another, and the USC should be ensuring that no one is left behind.**

I therefore dedicate my first pillar to the issue of food insecurity or more specifically on the lack of support that students have been receiving in this area. It is simply heartbreaking to see this lack of support in such a time of need for many, and something must certainly be done about it, especially when you consider that this is part of a wider trend across this country affecting millions of Canadians.

Presently, the USC's food bank is experiencing a shortage of funding, but certainly not a shortage of people in need of it. **This is why I would like to push for additional support in this time of need as it is our responsibility as a student government to provide for those who need our services.**

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This support would be realised through a reallocation of funds from other more well-financed portfolios or even by identifying underutilized funds in the budget and dedicating it to FSS. **Either way, the food bank will be receiving extra funding to hopefully help re-establish walk-ins.**

Advocacy also has a big role to play in this regard, mainly by facilitating greater cooperation between the USC and FSS on dealing with food insecurity. As an individual Councillor, I would also like to push for clubs and students to donate to the food bank, especially since many on campus are still not entirely familiar with the FSS or how they could contribute.

Furthermore, the severity of this problem is highlighted by the fact that universities such as UBC have already acknowledged the need to address food insecurity on campus. If Western - and by extension the USC - is the innovative institution it claims to be in its advertising, it should work to find meaningful solutions in this affordability crisis.

While the USC works on increasing funding for our food bank, **I would also like to establish a Food Insecurity Working Group within Council.** This body would be composed of fellow motivated councillors, executive members of Food Support Services as well as clubs, and concerned students at-large. **This would allow for a diverse set of voices to bring their ideas on how to properly tackle the food insecurity issue going forward and would hopefully combine professional and personal experience to create a solution that works for everyone.**

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The group would then generate a report that would be presented to the USC before the end of the fiscal year, who would then act based on that report's recommendations. My previous experience in creating documents of this scale and importance can ensure that this is done effectively.

Finally, in light of the lack of affordable food options on campus I would like to advocate for affordability within USC-run food operations such as the Wave, Spoke, and UCC Grocery Store.

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PILLAR II. SUSTAINABILITY

As we start seeing the effects of climate change and what harm carbon-based emissions are doing to our planet, it is clear that students would feel better about a USC that takes bigger and bolder action on climate justice and divestment. **This is why I am taking a hard stance on pushing sustainability initiatives within the USC as well as within the Social Science Students' Council (SSSC).** This advocacy will also expand to Western itself as I would like to campaign alongside pre-existing sustainability clubs among other student leaders to advance divestment.

Furthermore, my experiences within Ivey's Sustainable Finance Lab have made me aware of the growing industry of climate-conscious investing. They have also allowed me to recognize when an institution is clearly not advancing its climate commitments or worse, backtracking on them. **Therefore, my past experiences could allow the USC to better advocate for bolder sustainability initiatives within both faculty councils and Western itself.**

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PILLAR III. TRANSPARENCY

Throughout my 3 years at Western, I have seen countless students discuss how they either do not feel like the USC represents their interests or that they don't feel interested in getting involved in our political system. This is reflected in our voter turnouts, which have been consistently low as far back as most can remember.

This is heartbreaking to me as the USC has so much to offer students in terms of benefits (e.g. Purple Care) and could do so much more at its true potential. They are often the ones who decide what student-oriented programs receive funding and which ones don't see a penny of it. Generally, many students may believe that the USC is unimportant, but I suspect that is only because many are unaware of what programs are even associated with the organization.

This is why **I would like to do everything in my power to ensure that students feel encouraged to join the USC and the political sphere that surrounds it.** Presently, the average student often has to put in significant effort to even learn the basic functions of Council or even what it does, which often includes attending more than one evening council meeting and talking to various people involved in student government.

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This year, non-Council members consistently did not have permission to view meeting minutes and agendas, and access to a Zoom link to view meetings remotely was not updated regularly on the USC website. It is a failure of Council that the electors that supposedly hold the organization to account are deprived of their right to be informed of its work.

I personally had difficulty in doing research on Council and what it does specifically as much of it is behind closed doors and only accessible to those who are already a part of the USC. It was only when I first gained interest in running for Council that I was able to receive good information on the body that is responsible for the hopes and dreams of over 43,000 students.

This is problematic as not only does it make people disconnected from the process, but also serves to create an environment of cliqueness that discourages new voices from getting involved. Therefore, **I would like to ensure that the average student can easily be educated on how the USC works, what it does, or even how they could get involved if they wanted to.**

My experience in creating informative social media posts on political issues could make this possible. **I will ensure that information on the USC and its initiatives are as digestible to the average student as possible, creating a new generation of leaders that could bring fresh ideas to the Council.** I would also like to create specific issue-based posts that educate students on the most pressing issues within Council.

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Furthermore, I will ensure to clarify my positions on these specific issues, increasing transparency and **fulfilling a long-neglected duty that the elected official has to the voter.**

With all of these initiatives in mind, I hope to create an example whereby candidates are transparent and do not leave their voters behind once elected. Students are not pawns to be used once or twice during election season but rather individuals whose issues should be acknowledged long after voting has ended.

An educated and active voting population is important for any thriving student democracy. It is therefore why **I will work as hard as possible to ensure that Western is a place where political entrepreneurship could truly thrive.**

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