



**HURON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE STUDENTS' COUNCIL**  
**REPORT ON HURON AFFILIATION PROPOSAL**

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**OUR STANCE IN OPPOSITION**

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## Part 1: Introduction

### Summary of Report

This document has been prepared by the Huron University College Students' Council ("HUCSC") following the unanimous vote of elected student representatives at a General Assembly meeting held on March 28th, 2021 to oppose the proposal of Huron University College ("Huron") to seek independence from Western University ("Western"). The HUCSC is the primary political voice for undergraduate students attending Huron and operates according to the principles outlined in the HUCSC Strategic Plan.<sup>1</sup> As delineated in the HUCSC Strategic Plan, the HUCSC is *"best positioned to be able to understand and articulate the needs of the Huron student body."*<sup>2</sup> **Students are the stakeholders who have the most insight into what a good student experience looks like and thereby are the most qualified to speak to how Huron's proposal impacts that experience, both for current and prospective students.** The HUCSC values the input of our student body when we make decisions, and this means taking the time to have conversations, collect feedback, do research, and collaborate with other stakeholders on campus. For our organization, being a good leader means being a good listener first. Before taking a stance on Huron's proposal, we prioritized consultation with our community in order to put as much decision-making power as possible in the hands of students.

The following report (the "**Report**") was prepared in response to the announcement made by Huron of its intention to seek independence from the institution it is affiliated to, Western, and to whom Huron degrees are currently granted (the "**Proposal**"). In light of the events which are summarised below, this Report is intended to:

1. Communicate student sentiment collected through student outreach and consultation;
2. Outline the HUCSC's views and findings on the Proposal in a clear and succinct format, including:
  - 2.1. Highlight the lack of due process within the Consultation Process, notably (i) systemic lack of information (ii) concerns about the methodology of the Consultation Process and (iii) issues raised by gaps in the Consultation Process;
  - 2.2. Examine the Proposal's potential negative consequences in regards to our affiliation with Western, notably (i) Western Services and (ii) USC Services; and

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<sup>1</sup> "HUCSC Strategic Plan 2021-2025." *HUCSC*, 2 November 2020, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5320cae0e4b0686921429592/t/5fa03bed52405632b31c8a6b/1604336670968/HUCSC+Strategic+Plan+2021-2025+%281%29.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, page 7.

2.3. Emphasize the lack of sufficiently justified urgency for the Proposal.

The public release of this Report is a demonstration of our value of transparency; it is a priority for the HUCSC to “*communicate about how we are engaging in advocacy-related issues to our fellow students, especially when issues are important to students or pose significant challenges to their lives.*”<sup>3</sup>

**After serious consultation, deliberation, and following the unanimous vote of the HUCSC General Assembly, the HUCSC has decided to publicly oppose the Proposal until the recommendations in this Report have been addressed.** Since the announcement by Senior Administration to move towards disaffiliation, the HUCSC has been working tirelessly to better understand the Proposal and has sought to inform students of its implications. Through this Report we explain why we believe that the Proposal is not in the best interests of Huron and its community members.

This Report concludes that for a significant organizational change such as the Proposal, the burden of proof falls on Senior Administration to provide a clear and unequivocal case for its merits. The HUCSC has substantial procedural and logistical concerns with the Proposal and, to date, there has been insufficient justification given to support the Proposal or its underpinning presumptions and many of the community’s most pressing concerns have gone entirely unanswered. Given the potential loss of access to services, enrolment uncertainty, and other challenges this transition could create, the benefits of this Proposal for Huron community members have not been shown to outweigh the potential drawbacks. Furthermore, the HUCSC has been troubled by the lacklustre attempt by Senior Administration to educate stakeholders and back up its reasoning, especially due to the high levels of concern the Proposal has received from students and the broader Huron community.

The HUCSC's priority since Senior Administration’s Announcement has been to inform the student body about the Proposal, collect feedback, and communicate concerns to Senior Administration. Our efforts have included meetings with Senior Administration to emphasize the importance of student consultation, developing a student FAQ and anonymous comment tool, hosting a Student Town Hall with Senior Administration, inviting Dr. Barry Craig to speak at the February HUCSC General Assembly Meeting, releasing a student survey to collect data, and holding focus groups with the student body.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The HUCSC's efforts to inform the student body about the Proposal, collect student feedback and data, and now produce this Report have been necessitated by Senior Administration's insufficient communication with students and a lack of substantive consultation. **We urge Senior Administration to terminate their pursuit of the Proposal until the recommendations outlined in this Report have been adequately and substantively engaged with. Until these recommendations have been met, the HUCSC stands in opposition to the Proposal.**

### **Preparation of Report**

This Report was prepared following consultation with Huron students. The HUCSC engagement process, as noted above, involved anonymous feedback, a student survey, focus groups, engagement with individual students, an HUCSC Town Hall, and a discussion and vote by the HUCSC General Assembly. Over 300 students were consulted over the course of 5 weeks. Data was collected through an anonymous affiliation survey and confidential focus groups to supplement this Report. Survey data presented in this Report was collected from 280 students currently enrolled at Huron. Additionally, a series of 11 focus groups with 3-6 students in each group were conducted to collect qualitative feedback to supplement this Report. This also included two focus groups specifically for international students, and one specifically for mature students.

### **Background**

Huron has been affiliated with Western since Western's founding in 1878 when it incorporated what was then called Huron College.<sup>4</sup> Currently, this relationship is governed by an affiliation agreement that sets out the terms by which Huron utilizes Western academic and facility services, how Huron designs and runs courses, and how it admits students. The most recent affiliation agreement is dated 1 July 2019 (the "**Affiliation Agreement**"). The Affiliation Agreement lasts for a duration of 5 years and is not due to expire before July 2024.

On Tuesday, February 16th, 2021, Huron publicly announced its intention to pursue independence from Western in order to become an autonomous post-secondary education institution (the "**Announcement**"). Within the Announcement, Huron's senior administration team, consisting of (but not limited to) Dr. Barry Craig, President; Meaghan Blight, Vice-President University Growth; Dr. Geoff Read, Provost and Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences; Deborah Lucas, Vice-President Finance and Administration (together "**Senior**

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<sup>4</sup> "University of Western Ontario." *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University\\_of\\_Western\\_Ontario](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Western_Ontario).

**Administration**”), expressed their intention for Huron to, subject to a consultation period with the community and a vote of Huron's Board of Governors, apply to the Province of Ontario for the authority to grant its own degrees and renegotiate its Affiliation Agreement with Western University (the “**Proposal**”).<sup>5</sup> Senior Administration believes the Proposal is valuable because “*Huron can best fulfill our mission if we have more autonomy as it pertains to our curriculum and academic life.*”<sup>6</sup>

Following the Announcement, Senior Administration sought to engage with key stakeholders. For students, this has consisted of (i) one-on-one discussions with students who have reached out with concerns in which students can ask questions or provide feedback and (ii) answering questions at an HUCSC-hosted Town Hall and an HUCSC General Assembly Meeting. To HUCSC's knowledge, these engagements have been Senior Administration's only method of consultation with students to occur since the Announcement (the “**Consultation Process**”). Senior Administration has expressed that the Consultation Process would help to inform their recommendation to the Board of Governors at the relevant Board meeting.<sup>7</sup> The Consultation Process is planned to continue until the Board of Governors vote. The Board of Governors' vote was initially set to take place a few weeks after the Proposal's Announcement but was subsequently extended to July 2021. Huron's Board of Governors, which is responsible for the overall governance of the university, was created in December 2020 and elected in January 2021.

### **Senior Administration's Proposed Benefits**

Senior Administration has articulated that, by gaining increased autonomy, Huron would be better positioned to act on its mission and develop additional opportunities to develop a liberal arts education which trains Leaders with Heart. So far, Senior Administration has cited several direct benefits, with the most frequently emphasized as follows:

1. Huron would receive control over the approval of academic programs and courses which would allow it to approve material that better fit with its values, and to do so more easily;

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<sup>5</sup> For more background information on the Proposal go to [myhuron.ca/affiliation](https://myhuron.ca/affiliation).

<sup>6</sup> “Statement: Huron to begin consultations to amend current Affiliation Agreement, grant Huron degrees.” *Huron University College*, 18 February 2021, <https://huronatwestern.ca/news/statement-huron-to-begin-consultations-to-amend-current-affiliation-agreement-grant-huron-degrees/>.

<sup>7</sup> “HUCSC Town Hall with Administration.” *HUCSC*, 22 February 2021, 58:40, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HZoaMa33cwavnjS0KVQ-hlj6L0WpLUDm/view>.

2. Huron would receive control over its admissions rules which would allow it to select students based on factors other than academic averages, such as community involvement;
3. Huron would gain control over the tuition prices it charges students. As an example of the potential benefits of this, Dr. Craig has pointed out that when Western University increased international tuition last year Huron was required to follow suit;<sup>8</sup>
4. Huron would be able to advertise itself as an independent institution which would provide it access to new advertising options such as the Maclean's University Rankings;<sup>9</sup>
5. Increased autonomy would give Huron the flexibility to respond to what it calls "negative headwinds" facing liberal arts post-secondary institutions.<sup>10</sup>

HUCSC is of the view that the benefits cited above would be of great benefit for the long-term future of Huron. The HUCSC understands and values these benefits and we understand why the Proposal may be appealing. It is not our intention to discount these benefits nor to argue this decision is *solely* bad for Huron. **Instead, we believe that the drawbacks which we will present over the coming pages vastly outweigh the aforementioned benefits.**

#### **Following the Consultation Process: If Approved**

If approved, Senior Administration would apply to the Province of Ontario for the authority for Huron to grant its own degrees while it conducts negotiations with Western on a revised Affiliation Agreement. The HUCSC would also begin conducting negotiations on a potential new or revised Affiliate Agreement with the Western University Students' Council ("USC"). Senior Administration has indicated the Proposal would take effect for all students entering in September 2023. For current and future students entering before September 2023, Senior Administration has said that the Proposal "*will not affect any current Huron students, or even any incoming students this Fall.*"<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Ibid, 42:30.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 1:17:50.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 17:30.

<sup>11</sup> "Statement: Huron to begin consultations." *Huron University College*.

## Part 2: Lack of Due Process

Senior Administration has stated that the Consultation Process will enable “every voice [to] have an opportunity to be heard”<sup>12</sup> and that “a transparent and direct communication process between students and Huron is the perfect start for an inclusive consultation period.”<sup>13</sup> The HUCSC believes that Senior Administration has neither succeeded in adequately educating community members about the details of the Proposal nor in meaningfully consulting with students. In this Report, we identify significant concerns with how the Consultation Process has been facilitated thus far. The HUCSC is concerned that deep, systemic, and procedural problems exist with the methodology, forums, and engagement by Senior Administration when undertaking the Consultation Process which has resulted in a Process that is merely surface level.

### **Concerns about the Information Provided**

HUCSC believes that any substantive Consultation Process which respects the insights of students must make a legitimate attempt to provide the community with the clear and comprehensive information needed to develop a well-informed opinion. The HUCSC does not believe this has occurred. This is exacerbated by the approach Senior Administration has taken within the Consultation Process, notably its decision to engage with students one-on-one. While the HUCSC commends Senior Administration for taking the time to engage with students in this manner and to hear their concerns, the HUCSC has substantial concerns regarding the lack of transparency such an approach yields. By way of the Senior Administration’s approach, students and stakeholders are often unable to hear other people’s concerns - nor the Senior Administration’s responses to those concerns - because so many of them are being handled bilaterally in one-on-one Zoom calls. This makes any articulation of concerns shallow and prevents substantive engagement with underpinning problems with the Proposal. While the HUCSC recognizes that not all meetings can be recorded, **the HUCSC recommends that Senior Administration provide (i) a Report detailing all concerns and issues raised by its stakeholder Consultation Process that lists each question raised through the Consultation Process and Senior Administration’s response; and (ii) provide substantive assurances that all questions or correspondences received by Senior Administration which would fall into (i) would be provided to the Board of Governors for review.**

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<sup>12</sup> “HUCSC Town Hall with Administration.” *HUCSC*, 24:15.

<sup>13</sup> “Questions regarding Huron’s affiliation transition?” *Huron University College*, 23 March 2021, [https://www.instagram.com/p/CMurm\\_SLVww/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CMurm_SLVww/).



The HUCSC recommends the above in view of its engagement with its constituents. The HUCSC has been repeatedly informed that students have had to piece together an array of sources including emails, recorded events, and FAQs to try and develop an understanding of what is being proposed. Even then, many students are of the view that they do not fully understand the Proposal. Given this lack of communication, the HUCSC explicitly asked students about their opinion on the Proposal, based on the information received thus far. Huron students have overwhelmingly expressed their opposition to the Proposal (Figure 1a, 1b).

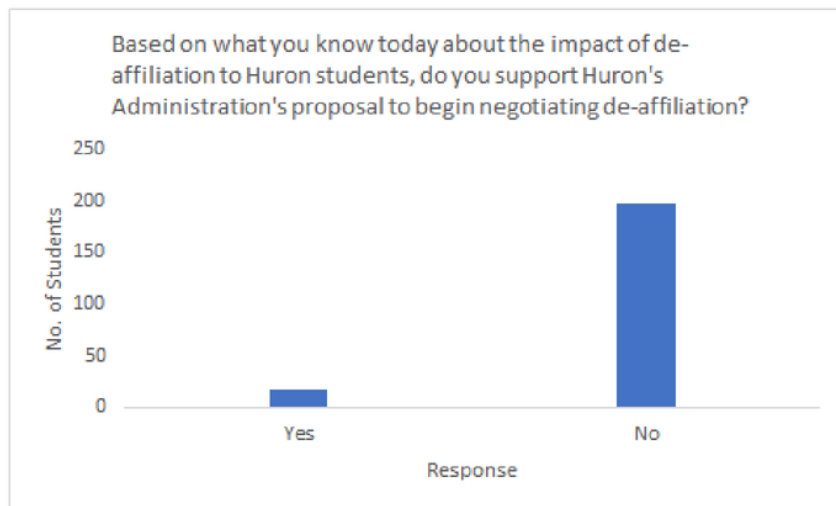


Figure 1a. A bar chart showing the number of students who support Administration's proposal to disaffiliate

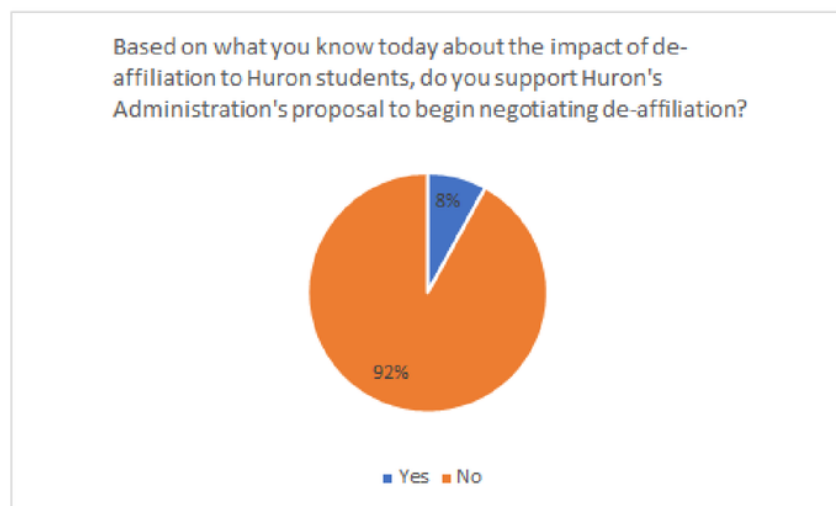


Figure 1b. A pie chart showing the percentage of students who support Administration's proposal to disaffiliate

The effort required to have a sufficiently informed understanding of the Proposal is unrealistic to the demands on students within the Consultation Process timeline. As a result, the students we have consulted are often confused or incorrectly informed about the Proposal despite their desire to know more. A proper understanding of the Proposal is needed for students to provide meaningful input, the lack of which calls into question any subsequent conclusions reached through the Consultation Process. **The HUCSC therefore recommends that Senior Administration take steps to extend the length of consultation at least until the end of the first term of the 2021/22 academic year to enable all students sufficient time and access to have their opinions heard.**

This gap in accessibility of information is not necessary. We have thus far been referring to “the Proposal”, and yet senior administration has not provided a comprehensive Proposal to the Huron community that fully outlines its details in one place. For a Proposal as significant as this, which according to Dr. Craig has come from “*several years of analysis*”,<sup>14</sup> it is more than reasonable to expect a detailed report-style proposal that explains each component step-by-step. We recognize that Senior Administration’s hope is to avoid showing all its cards prior to negotiations with Western, but doing so will invariably deprive Senior Administration from receiving any support from the HUCSC. Not only is there no centralized place to access information, but there have been no new details publicly released since February 2021 to address outstanding concerns, nor updates to existing information such as Huron’s FAQ.

Moreover, even for those willing and able to spare the time needed to synthesize the information that has been released, it is not sufficient to form a properly justified opinion. **Students have not been given compelling and comprehensive answers to central questions regarding services, enrolment, reputation, urgency and sustainability.**

### **Concerns about the Consultation Process**

When the Proposal was publicly announced on Tuesday, February 16th, Senior Administration planned on conducting their Consultation Process within the space of a few weeks<sup>15</sup> with the Board of Governors voting most likely around the end of March. The Proposal was announced during the Spring Reading Week, at a time when students, in an online context, were already disconnected from their professors and peers and more exhausted than would have been typical while in-person. As a result of the Reading Week timing, many students lacked the capacity to engage, effectively decreasing the consultation window by a week. Senior

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<sup>14</sup> “HUCSC Town Hall with Administration.” *HUCSC*, 16:05.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 1:34:00.

Administration subsequently extended the length of consultation to July 2021 amid concerns about their ability to receive proper feedback. As a key stakeholder in the future of Huron, students are a crucial party in receiving buy-in if the Proposal is to be successful. Thus far, Senior Administration's Consultation Process with students has consisted of the following:

1. The HUCSC Executive Team communicating student concerns through regular meetings;
2. Dr. Craig and other senior administrators answering questions at two public events in February, the HUCSC Town Hall and the February HUCSC General Assembly;
3. Students reaching out to Dr. Craig and other members of Senior Administration to individually share their concerns through mediums such as email, Zoom calls, or phone.

Regarding the efforts by Senior Administration, the HUCSC is of the view:

1. **Few of these components are new or specific to the Announcement of the Proposal.** The HUCSC executive team's meetings with Dr. Craig were already regularly occurring before the Proposal's Announcement, the HUCSC February Town Hall was scheduled in late 2020, and students already had the ability to directly contact Dr. Craig. Other than accepting the HUCSC's invitation to speak at our February General Assembly Meeting, these mechanisms were all already in place prior to the Announcement and no new avenues of communication have been established with students in regards to this Proposal.
2. **All existing avenues of feedback are passive rather than active, placing the impetus on the community to make themselves heard.** Although students have expressed willingness to attend another HUCSC-hosted Town Hall, Senior Administration has not displayed any intention to conduct focus groups, polls, or other proactive feedback mechanisms to get an unbiased reflection of student opinion. **This lack of direct engagement is a major concern for the HUCSC; it calls into question the legitimacy of the Consultation Process and provides no transparency of what information has been received.** Dr. Craig has said that the response he gets from students will inform the presentation he gives to the Board before its vote,<sup>16</sup> meaning if students overwhelmingly disapprove, the Board would be made aware. Yet, if there is no data-driven gauge of student opinion, he is in no position to give an objective reflection of whether students are in favour or not. On this note, Dr. Craig has said he plans to get an indication of support or opposition from faculty and staff to take to the Board but has not committed to doing the same for

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 58:40.

students or alumni.<sup>17</sup> Although both the President of the Alumni Association Board and the HUCSC President hold *ex officio* positions (positions held by virtue of their title) on the Board,<sup>18</sup> expressions of concern raised through *ex officio* positions are not procedurally the same as information relayed by Dr. Craig by way of an official report relating to the Consultation Process. **The HUCSC, therefore, recommends that a clear procedural framework be published by Senior Administration to outline the substantive goals of the Consultation Process, the manner in which concerns and support from key stakeholders will be recorded, and how those findings will be relayed to the Board.** To date, the HUCSC President has not received any substantive information in her capacity as *ex officio* on the Board of Governors indicating any preliminary data collected or student sentiment by way of the Consultation Process.

- 3. Passive mechanisms of feedback collection will mean that the feedback that Senior Administration receives is biased.** The feedback Senior Administration receives will overwhelmingly represent the perspectives of highly involved individuals such as student leaders, will control for students with passionate opinions (and may consequently lead to an overrepresentation of positive or negative feedback), and will mean that individuals who are only comfortable sharing feedback anonymously will not be heard.

This is not to say that senior administration is collecting sufficiently informed feedback from faculty, staff, and alumni. There have been separate Town Halls for students and alumni, and faculty/staff have received private information entirely separate from everyone else. **Because consultation with different stakeholders has been conducted in isolation from one another, community members are not exposed to the full range of implications of the Proposal and therefore are not set up to make an informed decision. Our current online context exacerbates the isolation of these stakeholder groups from one another and limits the capacity of the Huron community to develop a holistic understanding of the merits and drawbacks of the Proposal.**

### **Issues Raised by Gaps in the Consultation Process**

The Consultation Process has been insufficient in both informing the student community and collecting feedback. This raises three serious issues.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 24:15.

<sup>18</sup> "Huron Appoints New Board of Governors." *Huron University College*, 27 February 2021, <https://huronatwestern.ca/news/huron-appoints-new-board-of-governors/>.

**First, it calls into question whether the Proposal has been properly thought through.** For example, before the Proposal's Announcement, it was internally and confidentially announced to staff, faculty, and the HUCSC President on February the 12th. Prior to this, no students had been consulted. Senior Administration justified this by saying the decision had to be kept confidential due to its controversial nature.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, HUCSC understands that external individuals including business leaders and presidents of other universities were asked to give preliminary input on the Proposal.<sup>20</sup> The HUCSC President, currently Ziyana Kotadia, could have been committed to confidentiality through her role. Considering that she is a current member of the Board of Governors and a former member of the now-dissolved Executive Board, there is clear precedent for the HUCSC President to be trusted with confidential information relating to future strategic planning. Indeed, HUCSC is of the view that even if this had been expanded to other senior staff within the HUCSC, it would be possible for the Proposal to remain confidential while also allowing Senior Administration crucial feedback from students, primarily on the Consultation Process. Had the HUCSC been consulted in any way prior to the Proposal's Announcement, the relevant changes to the Consultation Process timeline could have been foreseen and amended prior to its Announcement. The HUCSC expresses concern over what important details will be missed by failing to adequately weigh the concerns of students and other community members.

**Second, the lack of forthcoming Reports, or data outlining a clear and comprehensive Proposal prevents students from effectively engaging with the Proposal.** Without the information needed to understand the implications of the Proposal and fairly weigh its potential positive and negative impacts, students and other community stakeholders are not equipped to provide any form of approval for the Proposal. Students therefore cannot, in good conscience, "buy-in" to the Proposal. Huron's past, current, and future students are stakeholders of Huron. Without buy-in from all groups, the branding, reputation, and culture of Huron - which we all hold dear - will be significantly impacted. This lack of buy-in also prevents Huron from receiving accurate and meaningful input to properly inform and guide their decisions regarding their pursuit of the Proposal.

**Third, a lack of meaningful consultation raises doubts regarding why the community has not been trusted to provide valuable feedback.** Senior Administration prides itself on creating thoughtful, ethical, and highly competent students, and yet by all accounts has put little weight on student feedback thus far. Senior Administration has appeared content in not

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<sup>19</sup> "HUCSC General Assembly Meeting." *HUCSC*, 28 February 2021, 29:00, <https://www.myhuron.ca/ga-archives>.

<sup>20</sup> "HUCSC Town Hall with Administration." *HUCSC*, 16:05.

providing comprehensive information outlining the Proposal's expected impacts, which implicitly relies on the community to trust the judgement of Huron's Senior Administration. While the HUCSC recognizes that the Board of Governors, through its fiduciary duty, must make a decision which is best for Huron, this obligation is made considerably more difficult if the Board is not provided adequate information detailing the substantial and problematic concerns with the Proposal that have been raised by stakeholders. So far, Senior Administration has seemed to consider themselves justified in not providing comprehensive information outlining the Proposal's expected impacts by relying on students and other community members to trust that their decision making is in good-faith and properly thought-out. Although the Senior Administrative team has done well in growing the university over the past four years, we do not believe it follows that they should be afforded unlicensed trust by students when a lack of proactive consultation indicates they have not demonstrated trust in their own past and current students to provide meaningful input. Any good idea should be able to withstand criticism, so the merits of the Proposal are cast into doubt by the lack of legitimacy in the informative and consultative processes. In order for Senior Administration to continue to be successful, they must continue to build community support and ensure all stakeholders feel listened to and valued.

### **Summary**

In summary, there have been significant flaws in Senior Administration's Consultation Process with students thus far. To alleviate the HUCSC's concerns regarding the lack of due process, the HUCSC recommends that Senior Administration:

1. Provide students with the tools needed to adequately inform themselves of the implications of this Proposal, and adequate procedural frameworks to ensure their voices are given proper weight;
2. Provide (i) a Report detailing all relevant questions brought to Senior Administration by all stakeholders and outline Senior Administration's substantive responses to each question; and (ii) provide substantive assurances that all questions or correspondences received by Senior Administration which would fall into (i) would be provided to the board for review;
3. Take steps to extend the length of consultation extend the length of consultation at least until the end of the first term of the 2021/22 academic year to enable all students sufficient time and access to have their opinions heard;

4. Publish a clear and procedural framework to outline the substantive goals of the Consultation Process, the manner in which concerns and support from key stakeholders will be recorded, and how those findings will be relayed to the Board.

### Part 3: The Western Advantage

#### Western University Services

Huron's long-standing relationship with Western has historically been celebrated for being the "best of both worlds." **Huron students can reap the benefits of membership to one of the most prestigious universities in Canada while simultaneously having access to a tight-knit community, personalized services, and small class sizes.** This relationship provides students access to a multitude of services, including Western classes and modules, campus spaces such as libraries and recreational facilities, varsity athletics, student support services, library services, health insurance, psychological services, exchange and research opportunities, the Western alumni network, technological services like OWL and Outlook, the international recognition that comes with a Western degree, and much more. Substantial concerns have been raised in the HUCSC's engagement with constituents as to how future access to these services will be handled. The lack of available information regarding the likely outcome of negotiations with Western means that students are completely blind to what the future would look like under the Proposal. As part of HUCSC's consultation process, we asked students explicitly whether these services were key reasons why they choose to attend Huron (Figure 2a, 2b). They confirmed, overwhelmingly, that they were. The Proposal poses a significant threat to students' continued access to them.

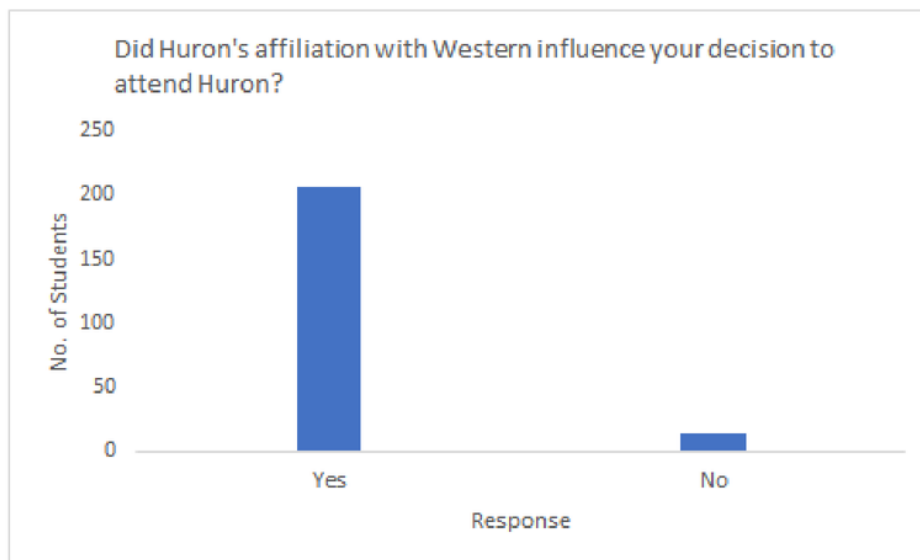
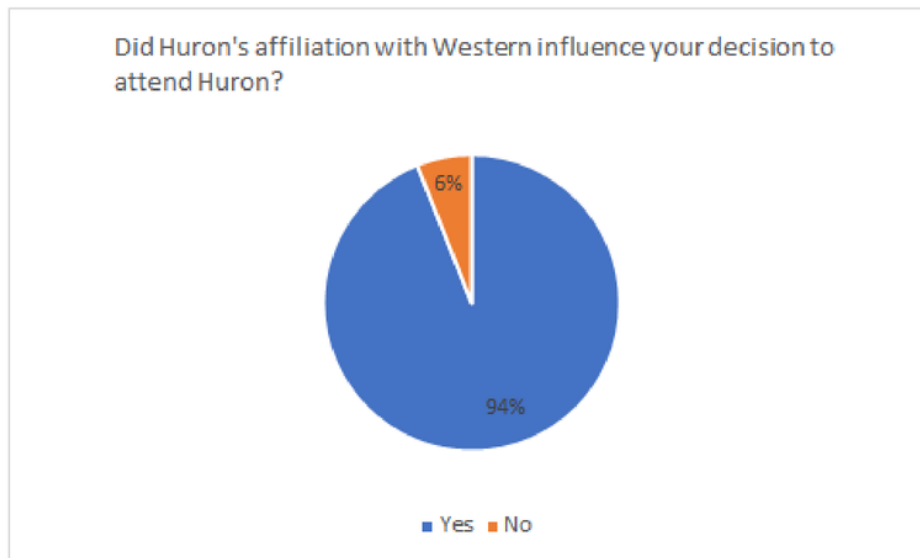


Figure 2a. A pie chart showing whether Huron's affiliation with Western influenced their decision to attend Huron





*Figure 2b. A pie chart showing whether Huron's affiliation with Western influenced their decision to attend Huron*

Students were asked several questions about the importance of current Western services to their student experience, including library services, modules and course offerings on other campuses, recreational facilities and varsity sports, health and wellness services, safety offices, student services, experiential learning, experiential learning and research opportunities, international student support services, access to Western's Alumni network and their status as Western students (Figure 3). This data suggests that access to services and opportunities offered by Western and status as a Western student were important factors for many Huron students in choosing to attend Huron. Students have many overlapping reasons for choosing to attend Huron, such as small class-sizes, so with this we intend to emphasize the significance of Western's benefits, not to suggest that they are solely responsible for students choosing Huron.

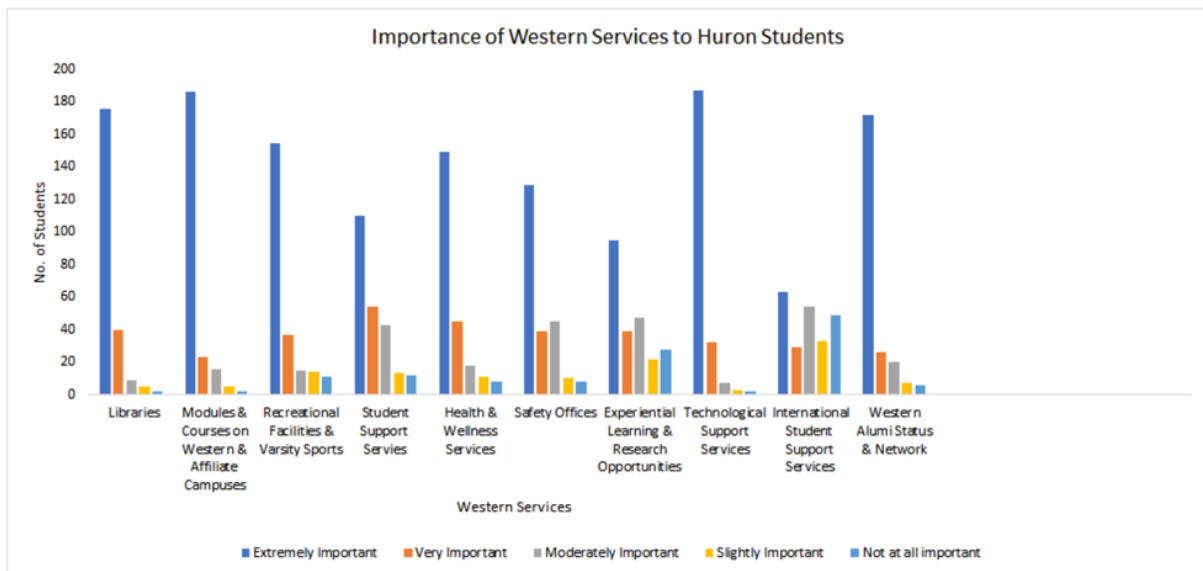


Figure 3. A clustered bar chart showing the importance of different services and opportunities offered by Western to Huron students.

**Concerns Relating to the Affiliation Agreement**

The HUCSC has substantial concerns regarding the viability of the negotiation of the Affiliation Agreement. Senior Administration’s Proposal involves changing the fundamental and underpinning principle of the entire agreement: the issuing of Western degrees. HUCSC does not believe that the agreement can be merely amended. It is incorrect and misleading to characterize the changes as minor amendments when the sought change underpins the entire relationship. As noted earlier in the Report, HUCSC believes the information provided to Students is misleading and detrimental to the Consultation Process.

The Affiliation Agreement with Western guarantees student access to certain services and academic services such as cross-flow teaching on an at “at cost” basis. These fees amounted to about \$2 million in 2020<sup>21</sup> but fluctuate based on student numbers per year, as they are pegged to 12.0% of student money received using a calculation including the Government-based, graduate and undergraduate enrolment grants and tuition revenues (which

<sup>21</sup> “Financial Statements.” *Huron University College*, 30 April 2020, page 6, <https://huronatwestern.ca/sites/default/files/2020-Huron-University-College-FS-2020-Final-Singed.pdf>.

are themselves discounted by 1.8% to account for withdrawals).<sup>22</sup> The 12% fee is said to account for cross-flow teaching between Huron and Western. If this Proposal is passed by Huron's Board of Governors, it would require Huron to negotiate a new agreement with Western University in order to pursue continued access to these services. The HUCSC expresses concern about the proposition of asking the Board of Governors to vote on terms not yet set which will substantially affect the future of Huron.

Dr. Craig has said he aims to maintain access to the majority of the benefits of our relationship with Western while paying the same price Huron currently does.<sup>23</sup> When asked at our February Town Hall why Western would agree to this kind of deal, Dr. Craig presented a few reasons for his optimism:

1. Western gets value from its relationship with Huron. Aside from the yearly payment from Huron, "*for the last few years, more Western students have taken Huron courses than vice-versa*".<sup>24</sup>
2. Dr. Craig says he has a good relationship with Dr. Alan Shepard, Western's president, and that Dr. Shepard has known for some time of Dr. Craig's concerns with the restrictions posed by their affiliation.
3. Western does not have a reason to make significant changes to the agreement because, in Dr. Craig's words, "*I don't think it does anything negative to Western.*"<sup>25</sup>

HUCSC has seen no data to substantiate any of the above reasons. Dr. Craig had not communicated about it with Dr. Shepard or any other members of Western's senior leadership team prior to the Announcement.<sup>26</sup> Western has communicated little about how it plans to approach negotiations, and Dr. Shepard has made no promises to Dr. Craig about how bargaining will unfold. He has, however, said the Proposal would "*profoundly change*" the relationship between the two universities and that the current deal is unlikely to continue in its current form.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "Affiliation Agreement between the University of Western Ontario and Brescia University College, Huron University College, and King's University College." University of Western Ontario, July 1, 2019, page 17, [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/affiliation/affiliation\\_agreement.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/affiliation/affiliation_agreement.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> "HUCSC Town Hall with Administration." *HUCSC*, 18:35.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 31:50.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 32:22.

<sup>26</sup> "HUCSC General Assembly Meeting." *HUCSC*, 41:08.

<sup>27</sup> Rodrigues, Rebekah. "Shepard says Huron's split would 'profoundly change' its relationship to Western." *The Gazette*, 11 March 2021, [https://westerngazette.ca/news/shepard-says-huron-s-split-would-profoundly-change-its-relationship-to-western/article\\_7a790a3e-7ad9-11eb-b3a8-73a5435cf93e.html](https://westerngazette.ca/news/shepard-says-huron-s-split-would-profoundly-change-its-relationship-to-western/article_7a790a3e-7ad9-11eb-b3a8-73a5435cf93e.html).

Although Dr. Shepard's comments thus far have given us little to go off of, the few comments made have indicated that it is unlikely Huron will receive the idealized outcome Dr. Craig has expressed confidence in, to the point of not publicly discussing all other possibilities. Although the HUCSC agrees with Dr. Craig's second point, this is actually one of the main causes of our apprehension. As Dr. Craig outlines, Dr. Shepard "*will negotiate this as a business decision.*"<sup>28</sup> In order to best serve Western University, Dr. Shepard has an incentive to limit the services Western provides Huron while charging as much for those services as he can. Should Huron go to the bargaining table, it will be under substantial financial and community pressure to sign a deal, giving Western significant leverage in negotiations. In negotiations, having a fallback plan or BATNA ("Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement") strengthens one's bargaining position because it provides certainty that the failure to secure a deal can be secured. So far, there has been no contingency plan or BATNA shared publicly or even privately with the HUCSC President.

As it stands, **the annual money transfer Huron sends Western which Dr. Shepard calls "modest"**<sup>29</sup> **is likely to substantially increase as Western moves away from an at cost basis.** For context, the roughly \$2 million currently transferred is comparatively small to Western's annual revenue, which is generally around \$800 million per year.<sup>30</sup> Significant challenges will have to be overcome in order to maintain access to services such as varsity sports (which will have to be negotiated with University Sports in addition to Western)<sup>31</sup> and access to Western modules.

HUCSC also notes that the Affiliation Agreement's structure, providing the Western Senate with the power to approve or deny Huron courses, is a key complaint from Senior Administration relating to the current situation.<sup>32</sup> However, Dr. Craig has expressed a desire for Western and Huron courses to be cross-recognized.<sup>33</sup> The HUCSC believes that Senior Administration has not acknowledged that for cross-recognition to occur, both the new Huron Senate and the Western Senate would need to still review the opposite's courses to ensure they fulfil the standards of the home institution. In effect, for Huron courses to be recognized at Western, they would still require approval from the Western Senate. **The Proposal does not**

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<sup>28</sup> "HUCSC Town Hall with Administration." *HUCSC*, 31:25.

<sup>29</sup> Rodrigues, Rebekah. "Shepard says Huron's split would change relationship to Western." *The Gazette*.

<sup>30</sup> "2020-21 Operating and Capital Budgets." *University of Western Ontario*, 31 March 2020, page 11, [https://www.ipb.uwo.ca/documents/2020\\_budget.pdf](https://www.ipb.uwo.ca/documents/2020_budget.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> "HUCSC Town Hall with Administration." *HUCSC*, 1:08:20.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 19:05.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 1:00:45.

**therefore take back complete control of academic programming as Senior Administration conveys.**

### **USC Services**

In addition to the Western services Huron accesses through the current Affiliation Agreement, Huron students also access services and opportunities through the University Students' Council, Western's students' council. Access to these services and opportunities is predicated on Huron students' status as Western students; the mandate of the USC, as articulated in their Charter, is "*to enhance the educational experience and quality of life for all undergraduates at Western University.*"<sup>34</sup> **As disaffiliated Huron students, Huron students would no longer be automatically eligible for the services and opportunities provided through the USC.**

USC services include access to the student-discounted LTC bus pass, a health and dental plan, opportunities to serve on or work for the USC (and USC-owned entities, such as the Spoke, the Wave, the Western Gazette, Western Film), access to nearly 200 clubs, student support services, events, representation and advocacy, Western's Orientation Week, USC's Peer Programs (Ethnocultural Support Services, PrideWestern, etc), Food Support Services, Peer Support Centre, Income Tax Clinic, and more. The HUCSC asked students about the importance of these services to their student experience. A majority of students considered these opportunities and services to be extremely important.

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<sup>34</sup> "USC Charter (2021)." USC, 7 March 2021, page 7, [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MV0RMmiz6x9W\\_ZWacLI6ZnXwVt4WalO3GdK2Y736YhQ/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MV0RMmiz6x9W_ZWacLI6ZnXwVt4WalO3GdK2Y736YhQ/edit).

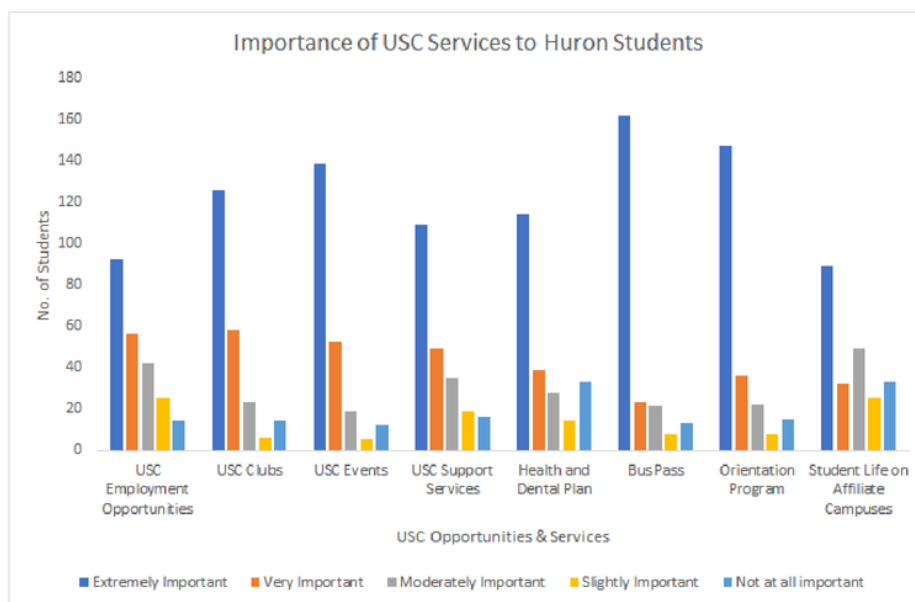


Figure 4. A clustered bar chart showing the importance of different services and opportunities offered by the USC to Huron students

The USC provides valuable services to Huron students that are not offered on Huron’s campus and which the HUCSC has neither the budget nor infrastructure to provide. The passing of the Proposal would necessitate high-level structural change for the HUCSC, as it is not sustainable for the student government organization of an independent institution to be run only by part-time student employees. Further, even if student fees shifted entirely to HUCSC from the USC, the economies of scale would be such that many of the aforementioned services are unfeasible. The USC also frequently hosts large-scale events that - due to their size - could not be replicated on Huron’s campus, such as concerts and conferences.

The USC services and opportunities currently enjoyed by Huron students are not accessed through the Affiliation Agreement, and the relationship between the HUCSC and USC is outlined in the councils' affiliate agreement, most recently dated 26 March 2019 (the “**Affiliate Agreement**”). The passing of the Proposal would necessitate the breaking of our Affiliate Agreement with the USC and require the HUCSC to negotiate a new agreement with them in order to attempt to maintain access to relevant services.

Thus far, Senior Administration has been unwilling to provide thoughts on what is likely to come of these negotiations, saying they “*have a whole lot less insight into the relationship between USC and HUCSC.*”<sup>35</sup> While the HUCSC recognizes that bilateral agreements made

<sup>35</sup> “HUCSC Town Hall with Administration.” *HUCSC*, 40:55.

between it and the USC are not matters purely relevant to Senior Administration, given that Senior Administration has expressed their interest in maintaining service levels for Huron students, the HUCSC would have expected this to have accounted for this in the Proposal. The HUCSC has assessed that there is a genuine risk that it will be unable to secure access to USC programming, support, and services - which for various reasons, is restricted to Western students only. Senior administration's lack of communication with the HUCSC before taking the Proposal public has resulted in neither party within the Affiliate Agreement fully understanding the implications of the Proposal. Consequently, Huron has severely limited the HUCSC's ability to properly prepare for negotiations by not providing members of the HUCSC notice before the Announcement. If it is a priority for Senior Administration to ensure the HUCSC's negotiations are as successful as possible, the HUCSC should have been given the time to prepare and research beforehand.

**Through preliminary conversations with the USC, the HUCSC has determined that there is a strong likelihood that service levels will be different for disaffiliated Huron students if Huron becomes an independent institution. Moreover, there is no guarantee that students in an autonomous Huron would be eligible for access to these services and opportunities at all.** While we cannot speculate on the likelihood of the HUCSC and the USC coming to a favourable deal, we would note that because the mission statement of the USC is to *"to enhance the educational experience and quality of life for all undergraduates at **Western University**"*,<sup>36</sup> any deal would likely require organizational change on their part, which the USC would have little incentive to do.

Should the HUCSC fail to secure a deal, the HUCSC would look to bring services such as a health and dental plan in-house in order to plug the resulting gap and possibly need to separately negotiate with the London Transit Commission ("**LTC**") for a bus pass. Many of these services are essential for student wellbeing and it is not currently possible for the HUCSC to offer these services on its own without a significant increase to student fees or support from Huron. Senior Administration has implied Huron would provide financing for these services where necessary,<sup>37</sup> but no substantively binding agreement has been made. Due to Senior Administration's lack of proactivity in collecting or engaging with student feedback, discussed earlier in this Report, HUCSC is concerned by the prospect of Huron sufficiently providing these services while meeting student needs. If Senior Administration were to take over these services, it would be a significant loss for student leadership and the autonomy of the HUCSC.

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<sup>36</sup> "USC Charter (2021)." USC, 7 March 2021, page 7, [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MV0RMmjjz6x9W\\_ZWacLI6ZnXwVt4WalO3GdK2Y736YhQ/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MV0RMmjjz6x9W_ZWacLI6ZnXwVt4WalO3GdK2Y736YhQ/edit).

<sup>37</sup> "HUCSC Town Hall with Administration." *HUCSC*, 41:10.

Furthermore, whether it is the HUCSC or Huron attempting to replace USC services, it would be impossible to replicate some of the services and opportunities that the USC is able to facilitate due to their size. For example, neither the HUCSC or Huron could host large-scale and high-profile concerts or facilitate a clubs system anywhere near comparable to the size of the USC's. Other valuable services and opportunities, like representation on the USC's Council, would be, HUCSC expects, entirely lost and economies of scale mean that the prices for the services that HUCSC does manage to provide would be significantly higher. These services are currently an integral part of Huron students' quality of life, mental health, and social experience. **Similar to what we saw regarding our discussion of services provided by Western, the Proposal will incur a loss in the quality and/or the number of services Huron students receive and costs will increase for either the HUCSC, Huron, or both, regardless of how negotiations go.**



#### Part 4: Lack of Sufficiently Justified Urgency

Over the past four years, Huron has undergone an unprecedented turnaround from its position of near-insolvency just four years ago. Enrolment and entering averages are increasing, Huron has just established its first Board of Governors, and there is strong optimism about the institution's future. To most onlookers, Huron is positioned for tremendous growth and success over the coming decade. In essence, keeping things as they are does not seem to be an unappealing proposition. Considering this, as well as considering Huron's financial commitments to significant infrastructure projects and that Huron is in the midst of a global pandemic, the question "why now?" has repeatedly resurfaced. **The timing of this Proposal seems to subject many of the institution's positive strides of the past four years to a gamble, subject Huron to unnecessary financial uncertainty, and prevent the community from engaging in meaningful in-person consultation.**

Moreover, the Proposal has been put forward amid a year of unprecedented affordability, safety, and mental health concerns. Placing labour on students to inform themselves on this issue during this period - especially leading into exam season - has put extra stress on students and created unneeded anxiety about the future. Given the difficult year students have had to navigate and the online context that has already isolated our student community from each other, the timing of this Announcement neither encouraged active dialogue among students nor was it compassionate to students' circumstances. Taking all of this into account, we believe there would need to be significant reasons to justify putting the Proposal forward at this time.

In response, Senior Administration has framed the Proposal as the best way to ensure the continued success and sustainability of the institution.<sup>38</sup> Due to negative trends Huron believes liberal arts institutions are facing, Senior Administration has put forward that the sooner the institution can prepare itself, the better. Dr. Craig has pointed to "*an erosion in student interest and enrolment in liberal arts programming*" in North America over the past two decades to explain the negative headwinds that are approaching.<sup>39</sup> While data does exist that suggests a decrease in liberal arts enrolment in some areas over certain periods of time, it has not been demonstrated by Senior Administration that these trends will continue into the long-term future or impact Huron specifically. Furthermore, it seems contradictory to single-out the issues liberal arts institutions are facing as evidence of concern while pointing to the fantastic enrollment

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<sup>38</sup> "Affiliation consultation FAQ." *Huron University College*, 18 February 2021, <https://huronatwestern.ca/news/statement-huron-to-begin-consultations-to-amend-current-affiliation-agreement-grant-huron-degrees/>.

<sup>39</sup> "HUCSC Town Hall with Administration." *HUCSC*, 16:45.

numbers of both Huron and liberal arts institutions on the East Coast as reasons why the Proposal will be beneficial.<sup>40</sup>

It is also not clear to us that having institutional autonomy means that Huron is better positioned to face a potential decline in liberal arts enrolment. Liberal arts education benefits strongly from dual degree programs, cross-campus resources, and opportunities for interdisciplinary education which Huron could lose out on as a result of this Proposal. **In short, Huron's community members have not been provided with the evidence needed to justify the urgency of passing the Proposal.**

In light of this, let us remember that Huron's current trajectory is positive. Should the Proposal not be passed, there is little reason to think that its admissions levels, infrastructure development, and reputation will not continue to improve. Perhaps, at some point in the future, trends may surface that make it more difficult to operate at a high level. All the more reason then to get this right. One need not make hasty decisions to fix slow-moving problems. **Time should be taken to deliberate, inform the community, and wait for the right opportunity to act on this Proposal, rather than stirring up unnecessary controversy and uncertainty.**

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 49:42.

## Part 5: Recommendations

The HUCSC respects and appreciates the work Huron's Senior Administration has done over the past four years in bringing students together around the shared message of Leadership with Heart. With that said, respect does not preclude serious questions from being asked about the Proposal. As noted in Parts 1 through 3, substantial actions must be taken by Senior Administration to receive support from the HUCSC, and, based on the surveys collected, the support of current students. In its current form, the Proposal has not been shown to be in the best interests of students or the institution. Until substantial changes are made to the Proposal and the consultative methods preceding its approval, it should not be taken to the Board of Governors. Utilising the data collected and relayed within this Report, the HUCSC outlines the following recommendations. **Without substantive engagement and convincing evidence with respect to the concerns and recommendations raised in this Report, and in line with the unanimous March 28th HUCSC General Assembly vote, the HUCSC will not consider supporting the Proposal.**

The HUCSC calls Senior Administration to act on the following recommendations:

1. **A clear and procedural framework must be published by Senior Administration to outline the substantive goals of the Consultation Process, the manner in which concerns and support from key stakeholders will be recorded, and how those findings will be relayed to the Board.**
2. **Senior Administration must take all feasible steps to properly *inform* students and the Huron community about the details of the Proposal including both its positive and negative impacts. This would entail, at minimum, a document that outlines, step-by-step, each aspect of the Proposal, the reasoning behind it and should include (but is not limited to):**
  - a. All relevant questions brought to Senior Administration by all stakeholders and outline Senior Administration's substantive responses to each question;
  - b. Assurances that all questions or correspondences received by Senior Administration which would fall into (a) would be provided to the board for review;
  - c. A data-driven articulation of why the Proposal is needed *now*;
  - d. Clear empirical evidence of the negative trends facing liberal arts institutions, why they are likely to continue long term, and why they will impact Huron;
  - e. Clear and specific justification for how disaffiliation would help mitigate any negative trends facing liberal arts institutions;

- f. Clear empirical evidence to support Senior Administration's claims that Huron decoupling from Western would not affect domestic or international recruitment of high-quality students;
- g. Details of how Senior Administration seeks to address long-term systemic risks of renegotiating an amended Affiliation Agreement following the departure of Dr. Craig or Dr. Shepard;
- h. A BATNA ("Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement") contingency plan for worst-case negotiation scenarios with Western;
- i. Created in collaboration with the HUCSC, a written agreement for how current USC services and opportunities would be replaced, should an agreement not be reached with the USC, to outline the type of support Senior Administration would provide Huron students and the HUCSC in implementing those lost services; and
- j. An analysis of the feasibility of the Proposal from a hired third-party, including financial projections of how Huron would cope with the aforementioned contingency plans and an assessment of the impact of the Proposal on Huron's academic relationship with Western;

3. **Senior Administration must take all feasible steps to *actively consult* students, as opposed to waiting for individual students to initiate contact.** This would entail:

- a. Delaying the Board of Governors vote on the Proposal, at minimum, until the end of the first term of the 2021/22 academic year to enable all students sufficient time and access to have their opinions heard, or until students are in-person and have a legitimate, face-to-face opportunity to give feedback;
- b. Collecting feedback directly from students through avenues such as focus groups, surveys, and (if necessary) referenda votes. This feedback should be made available to the student body, except when feedback is collected confidentially;
  - i. As part of this feedback collection, Senior Administration must develop a plan, to be shared with the HUCSC Executive, to share student feedback collected, delineate how participants' confidentiality will be protected, and articulate how the collected feedback will be incorporated into the Proposal.
- c. Establishing mechanisms for students to provide anonymous feedback on the Proposal;

- d. Establishing mechanisms whereby different community stakeholders (such as students, staff, faculty, and alumni) are consulted together; and
- e. Seeking feedback and input on the Proposal directly from HUCSC Executives and the HUCSC General Assembly to ensure student experience concerns are accounted for and incorporated into the Proposal.

Without substantive engagement by Senior Administration to address the concerns of students or make efforts to engage with the HUCSC in a transparent manner to adopt these recommendations, HUCSC will direct, in accordance with the unanimous motion passed at the HUCSC General Assembly meeting dated March 28th, 2021, that its Executive Council (i) actively oppose all efforts by Senior Administration to downplay past, current and future student discontent or concern with the Proposal; (ii) oppose all steps to enact the Proposal and; (iii) take relevant steps to notify the members of the Board of Governors of the concerns of students expressed in the data collected for the purposes of this Report.

Respectfully signed on behalf of the 2020-2021 HUCSC General Assembly,



Ziyana Kotadia, 2020-2021 HUCSC President



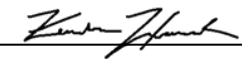
Alexis Magder, 2020-2021 HUCSC Vice-President of Student Affairs



Andrew McCann, 2020-2021 HUCSC Vice-President of Finance and Administration

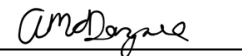


Rachael Toffoletti, 2020-2021 HUCSC Vice-President of Student Events



Kendra Hancock, 2020-2021 HUCSC Vice-President of Communications

With Support from:



Allison McDougall, 2020-2021 BHTS President

*Dated this day, March 29, 2021.*