Transcript Recording for VP Internal Q&A

Due to technical difficulties the video recording from the VPI Q&A is not available, and we are instead providing the written transcript. Thank you for your understanding.

MODERATOR

Because it is now a question and answer, we're going to keep basically the same format, we'll have 90 second and 5 min questions. You don't have to use all the 5 min by yourself, of course, but you know as much as you'd like to use that 5 min. We'll begin with your opening statement which will be 2 min. So, whenever you're ready.

TAMMY MANIOU

Hey. Thank you, Jamie. Hi everyone, thanks for coming to tonight's debate. Happy International Women's Day. My name is Thomais Maniou, but most people know me and refer to me as Tammy. I use she/her pronouns. I'm from Athens Greece and I'm doing a double major in biochemistry, molecular biology as well as philosophy. I'm currently in the fifth year of my undergraduate degree. I'm also a longtime member and current president of the Dalhousie and Kings Debate Society.

The reason why I'm running for VPI is that I want to support soon societies and their members. I want to help the societies that barely made it out alive from the pandemic. I want to help the societies that are just starting and need resources to build themselves up, and I want to help the societies that are underrepresented in our student community. For me, joining the debate society helped me in the transitional period from moving to a new country, knowing no one my age, and feeling isolated and alone, to feeling like an active participant within the Dalhousie community, valued and appreciated for who I am. I want to ensure that people find their own community and support system on campus as well.

Societies have been facing unique struggles in these unprecedented times, you know, mainly because of the continual declining mental health of students. In terms of like the recruitment and retention front we see people not wanting to engage with the societies because they are facing their own ongoing issues that have been exacerbated because of pandemic. And you know, fatigue and burnout from being online 24/7. Many people simply don't have the bandwidth to actively participate in societies anymore. Societies need guidance in our new hybrid air which I can offer. Having experienced myself the winds of pitfalls of navigating the presence and operations of a society, and ever changing, ever contradicting issues situation. To offer this guidance have 3 main goals, one to provide more resources for student societies in terms of knowing how to promote themselves, how to create meaningful connections with their members, and how to support them when they need to, as well as group of accessibility barriers for executives and society members alike. Yeah, thanks for listening.
MODERATOR

Perfect, thank you. And so, we'll begin with a 90 second question. And so, the question is, what is your experience working with societies at Dalhousie and how will you use that experience if elected?

TAMMY MANIOU

Thank you. I think I have a unique experience as a society president that has been an executive position throughout the pandemic. I have seen firsthand what it is like to try to recruit and retain people in a situation where people simply have their own battles to deal with, and as well, having to basically, you know, control and ever change the presence and operations of your society, based on whether you know, you're allowed to host in-person meetings or not, for example, or whether the events that you're hosting are allowed to be in person or online. All these different factors are things that have basically reduced how much students are engaging with student societies. And what I want to do is, you know, having that knowledge and having that experience, help people do what I did right, help people avoid what I did wrong, and basically make them feel like they have somebody who not only can listen and advocate for them, but who also understands exactly what they're going through. And I think that this is going to be an important thing, as we transition to this new hybrid era on campus. Thank you.

MODERATOR

Thank you. And so, the next question is another 90 second question. The question is, what are the biggest issues facing societies at Dal and how do you plan to tackle them?

TAMMY MANIOU

Right. So, I think the main issues that societies face right now are not only on an operational level in terms of how they can promote themselves, how they can run events, you know, make themselves known on campus, and establish a connection with students. But as well, their student membership experiences their own unique problems, from their declining mental health to raising tuition, having to, you know, work a job instead of engaging in extracurricular activities, or simply not having the need to be in front of their computer for another hour every other week, or whatever. And basically, I think what needs to be done is to help people deal with those issues, not only on the individual level. But also, you know, as societies. We need to help societies learn how to help their students in order for everybody to have an opportunity to engage with their activities, to engage with, you know, their advocacy efforts, to engage with everything that they need.
MODERATOR

Perfect. Okay. So, the next question is a 5 min question, so take as much time of that 5 min as you like. The question is, what resources does the DSU provide that you think are the most critical?

TAMMY MANIOU

Right. So, I think some of the most important resources that the DSU provides for societies specifically, the DSU provides grants to societies that need funding, which is crucial, especially when it comes to hosting events in terms of, you know, making events more accessible for some of their students that you know, can't afford to participate in certain events. That money is simply crucial. As well, I think that the DSU has a very underutilized platform that these societies can directly use, as a means to make themselves known on campus, and make themselves known as you know, we're here, this is what we do, come join us, things like that. As well, I think that things like the anti-oppression training that the DSU provides is an excellent first step into making societies more accommodating and accessible to students. So yeah, what I want to see basically is more of that, of all these, like good resources that the DSU has. And, you know, develop them and transform them for societies, so they can utilize them to the maximum.

MODERATOR

Thank you. We have one more question before our break. Or make that two questions, apologies. And so, the next question is a 90 second question: How do you plan on increasing communication to students and their student union?

TAMMY MANIOU

All right. So, I think the thing that the DSU does right now, where not only does the VPI have office hours, but also there's a newsletter that is going out to societies every month, or like every 2 weeks now, with the you know, changing circumstances with the pandemic, is an excellent resource. I think what needs to happen is for the VPI to establish direct pathways of communication between themselves and societies on campus, so reach out to the Presidents, ask them, What can I do for you? Because I think at the end of the day as a student advocate, that is the responsibility of the VPI, it is to make themselves known, and that, you know, let societies know that what if they're struggling, or if they have an idea that they don't know how to implement or that they need extra resources, that the VPI is out there, and can first of all do what is within their power to help them do their event, or what have you, but also talk to other executive officers within the DSU to basically find a solution together, and, you know, create more avenues of accessibility for these societies.
MODERATOR

Perfect. Thank you. And our final question before our break is a 5 min question. And the question is, in what areas do students need support the most right now?

TAMMY MANIOU

That is an excellent question. I think there are multiple fronts that the students are facing difficulties right now. First and foremost, students need more mental health resources on and off campus because of everything that's been going on. There are so many stressors in terms of how people engage with school, how people engage with their difficulties that they face in their lives, facing financial problems, facing, you know, anxieties that every single college student has in this day and age. But also, I think that another problem that needs to be addressed immediately is the ongoing increased tuition on campus. I think that is a problem that all students face, especially international students. Because you know personally, I think that, you know, tuition increases are horrible. I think they're discriminatory. I don't support them at all. And I wish that, you know, somebody would listen to students, actually, and not just have them fill out a survey and call it a day. That they actually listen to students and do what needs to be done, which is, provide support to students and freeze tuition and all those things.

I think as well, another thing that sometimes students face is different kinds of accessibility on campus, feeling like they're a member, a valued member within campus, feeling like after they get their degree they will get a job, but they're also valued within the academic community, or what have you. I think another very important issue that is often overlooked, to my dismay, is student accommodations and accessibility for you know, students with disabilities. I think that oftentimes we don't see how difficult life can be for students with disabilities on campus, and because you know a lot of non-disabled people don't have the power to see them, don't do anything to change the situation. So, I think we need to provide more resources to students with disabilities, like we need to listen to them. We need to provide collaborative support to them and help them, you know, advocate for themselves on the DSU level. Yeah, thank you.

MODERATOR

Perfect. Thank you. And so that is our final question before break. So now we will have a 10 min break and so it's currently 8:55 P. M. So, we will come back at 5 after. Thank you so much.

(BREAK). All right, so we'll move on to our next question and it sort of relates to your response from your last question. This is another 90 second question, and the question is, what does an accessible Executive / Council look like for you? And what will you be doing to make yourself accessible?

TAMMY MANIOU
Excellent question. So, in terms of accessibility I think there are two main fronts that we need to consider. The first one is how accessible is the VPI as a person, as a position themselves, in terms of how can people contact them? Do people know their presence on campus? Do they know when their office hours are? Do they know that they will be listened to, right? But I think the second thing is that in terms of providing more accessibility to people, we need to a) listen to people with disabilities, or people who are from marginalized communities and actually do what they are asking us to do. But also, I think it is important to essentially create more streamlined processes for people with disabilities. So, for example, a lot of people with disabilities can't do things like fill out forms right? So, I think that streamlining processes within the DSU is going to help a lot of people actually utilize the resources that the DSU provides for them, and to be in a place where they can understand and ask for more things from the DSU. So yeah, that was just an example, but helping people, in general, communicate and engage with the DSU is a way to do that.

MODERATOR

Next we have another 90 second question, and the question is, what improvements are you looking to make surrounding student mental health?

TAMMY MANIOU

So, I think what needs to happen is to more tangibly and immediately advocate for more mental health resources on campus and advocate for things like allowing people to, you know, take mental health days off or create a culture on campus where people understand that experiencing some sort of mental illness is like being regularly, you know, physically ill, right? So, if I have a sick day, I don't have to go to class, right. If I have a sick day, I don't have to take this exam right now, I can actually reach out to my professor and say hey, I can't do this right now, can we reschedule this, right? But also, I think, in terms of the VPI position specifically, I firmly believe that you know engaging with people on campus through student societies, meeting new people, meeting people that have similar interests to you or people who belong in the same group as you, and together you find a support system that you can advocate for each other, that you can actually uplift each other and support each other, I think those are very meaningful ways of actually helping people improve their mental health. And I think we can do that because the DSU has so many incredible societies that do that in one way or another. So I want to support them.

MODERATOR

Next, we have a 5 min question. So, the question is, how do you plan on supporting societies during the covid-19 pandemic and in a post-covid return?
TAMMY MANIOU

Right. So, I think the most important thing that needs to happen is, first of all, I know, I said this a lot, but in terms of communication, actively communicate with student societies as to what sort of responsibilities they have in terms of keeping their student members safe and in terms of what their capabilities are at any given time, whether you know campus is going to be closed, whether in person meetings are allowed, or they're not allowed. But also, I think, what's most important is creating resources in terms of how to navigate existing in a hybrid world as a society right? So this is what this looks like is what platform should I use if I want to do my meetings in a specific way? How can I reach out to people when everything is like lockdown, for example, hopefully, not again but you know, and I need to reach out to people. How do I help people in in situations where they can't interact with my society as it runs right now, and they prefer the other formats like, if you're online. But different person if they prefer online or in person, you know those kinds of things.

As well, I think we need to create a society culture where societies, not only from martialized groups, but in general, with similar hobbies and interests can collaborate with each other, to say hey, Do you want to do an event together, or hey, I faced a similar problem to you and our societies run a similar way, I think you could do this to help yourself right. Actually help societies ask for more resources, depending on what the need, whether they need to allocate their budget towards different things, depending on what the format is, and in general, there needs to be a level of flexibility that needs to be acquired, and I think the VPU position can really help on that front.

MODERATOR

Awesome. Thank you. So next we have a 90 second question. I'm just going to adjust my timer. Okay, So the question is, what do you plan to do in your first semester in office?

TAMMY MANIOU

So, the first semester in office is the summer semester, and that is when a lot of societies undergo the ratification process, they go through training, they ask for funding, things like that. So I think what needs to happen is to start looking into ways in that first semester, to make these processes more accessible to student executive members, helping them understand how the processes work, making training more available and also again, helping people understand, how am I supposed to run a society if I want to run a society this upcoming year, and I don't know how to do it. Who can I reach out to who can help me, set myself up for success? Right? I think those are very important things that need to happen in that first semester of when people, you know, don't have as many things to do, but also are setting up their societies, and I think that that is what we should primarily focus on.
MODERATOR

Okay. We have 2 more questions, and the next one is a 5 min question. And the question is, how do you plan on supporting marginalized groups on campus in your role?

TAMMY MANIOU

Right, again, great question. I think that first of all, I need to acknowledge my privilege, and that I don't belong in that many marginalized groups, and that the fact that this is a thing. I need to reach out to people and create communication pathways, so that I operate from a place of knowledge and respect. So that means reaching out to the societies that represent those marginalized groups. But also creating a safe space for people to reach out to me and ask me how we can improve their on-campus experience. I think that on top of everything else that the DSU does Currently, what we need to do is actually create meaningful change in terms of how we respond to instances where people, where people face things like microaggressions right. How can people deal with those, How can people catch themselves when they do them right? So broadening the anti-oppression training to include those things, right? and in general I think that by creating more positions on campus, where we do try to engage marginalized groups and campus life and student employment, those are good things. Another thing is that we ought to teach student societies how to recruit and attract people from marginalized groups by making them feel safe by making them feel heard, and that they belong. And I think that there are a lot of good resources to do that.

MODERATOR

Perfect. Thank you. And our final question is a 90 second question. And the question is, what is one unique thing that you bring to the role, and how do you plan on putting it into action?

TAMMY MANIOU

Right. So, like I said earlier, I have been in an executive position for a student society throughout this pandemic. I think I have unique knowledge in terms of what it is that as student societies are currently facing and having sort of faced similar pains, I can tell not only what other societies are facing on when they tell me, but also what it feels like to be in a position where you're trying to you're trying to do the best you can, and you're trying to help your society grow but your efforts are falling flat. I can definitely empathize with that because I've experienced it myself, and I want to sort of highlight the fact that as a person who moved here from another country, I have felt like I don't belong, I have felt like I don't matter on campus, but I also know that it's not a permanent thing. I know that I know how to engage with people on campus. I know that at the end of the day it's all going to be okay? Which sounds a bit lovey-dovey, but yeah, I think I have All the experience needed to support some societies, and I hope that I will do that to the best of my abilities.
MODERATOR

All right. Thank you so much, Tammy, for participating in this absolute marathon of questions. To finish off we have your closing statement, which is one a minute so whenever you're ready.

TAMMY MANIOU

Throughout this whole endeavor, I’ve aimed to make people as passionate as I am about student politics, mainly by running an information-based campaign, but also by just talking about elections and how important it is to engage with the voting process, and in the democratic process in general. I want to let you know that if I'm chosen for the VPI position, I will do anything in my power to help you in concrete and tangible ways and made you feel heard and empowered. I want to create more student societies, I want to help societies promote themselves and collaborate with one another, and I want to make the VPI position more visible and accessible. I believe in the power that students societies have, I believe in the people in them, and I believe that together we can create a better campus experience. Thank you for listening. Follow me on Instagram and Facebook, feel free to message me, I would love to hear from you, and have a good night.

MODERATOR

Alright. That is the Q. and A. for this evening. And I'll pass it back to William, our CRO.

CRO

Okay, great. So yeah, thank you so much, Tammy, for participating in this. Q. And A. and thank you to our moderator Jamie, for helping to facilitate it along with all the rest of the debates and Q. and A. Sessions this week. I also want to quickly thank the rest of our elections team who are also here. So, thanks to everybody for coming, we still have 2 more sets of Q. and A. Sessions tomorrow, from 7:30 to 9:30. And then just as the last note, please remember to vote. Voting is happening on the fourteenth and fifteenth of March, and you'll be receiving an email to your Dal email. So please make sure to take a look at all the candidate information and get your votes in.