



## Vice-présidence (affaires externes) de l'AÉUM

*Située sur les territoires traditionnels des collectivités Haudenosaunee et Anishinaabe.*

### SSMU Vice-President (External)

*Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories.*

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# Generative Discussion on Federal & Provincial Advocacy at SSMU

18-04-2024

## Why this report?

Historically, the SSMU has participated in many student federations and coalitions at both the provincial and federal levels. In the past few years, momentum has died down around affiliation. The SSMU has been a member of UCRU since 2021 in a relatively unofficial capacity, and has not been a member of a provincial coalition since the TaCEQ (2014).

This report serves to update the Legislative Council and members of the SSMU on our current position with regards to student federations and to explore possibilities for the next few years.

## Brief overview of SSMU's Involvement in Student Associations

The SSMU has participated in many federal and provincial coalitions of student associations dating as far back as 1926. Please see [this article](#) on the External Affairs website for more detail.

Most recently, at the provincial level, the SSMU was involved with the TaCEQ (Table de Concertation Étudiante du Québec) until 2014, and the Interassociatif until 2022.

At the federal level, SSMU has been a member\* of UCRU ([Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities](#)) since 2021.

## Relevant IRs of Representation & Advocacy

[IR-03: Municipal, Provincial, and Federal Representation](#)



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Provincial: CRUES, UEQ

### **L'UEQ (Union Étudiante du Québec, QSU):**

The [QSU is a provincial lobbying organization](#) that represents close to 93,000 students (2024). Their member associations are mostly campus-wide associations such as the SSMU. Their approach to advocacy consists of closed-door meetings with Provincial Ministers and Staffers in order to make small gains for students, as well as irregular protests in front of the National Assembly. In addition, the QSU produces [research papers](#) upon which advocacy campaigns can be based and priorities can be determined.

- See also: [One-pager on the QSU prepared in advance of PGSS's referendum on QSU Affiliation](#)

While the QSU certainly holds a presence in the provincial political advocacy space, it must be noted that the campaigns that the QSU contributes to, and therefore the positions it holds as a result of its membership, are not in line with those of the SSMU. One example of this with the QSU is their [climate-related campaign, "Enough is Enough!"](#), which calls upon the Province to increase funding to universities so that they can reduce their carbon footprint. This campaign, as a whole, does not align with the SSMU's views on the climate crisis and the necessary changes to bring warming below 1.5°C.

The same is true for the SSMU at the federal level, where the positions, plans and policies of the Society that demand systemic change are often at odds with the policies of other student associations and alma mater societies.

Another area of concern surrounding UEQ is the coalition's partisanship and tendency to align with the PLQ (Quebec Liberal Party). A most recent example of this is the joint petition that was launched by the SSMU, the Concordia Student Union (CSU), and the Bishops' Student Representative Council (BUSRC). Since the BUSRC is a member of the QSU, the provincial coalition helped facilitate the sponsorship of the petition to the national assembly. After some time, the SSMU and the CSU became almost silent partners in the petition project, where the BUSRC, QSU, and the Liberal Party had taken the spotlight in mainstream media. Meanwhile, students at McGill and Concordia were doing the legwork (via class announcements, workshops, email campaigns, etc) to help the petition gain over 30,000 signatures.

- During the student mobilization against tuition hikes in 2012, the Quebec Liberal Party was in power under former Premier Jean Charest. The Liberals are not well-regarded by the rest of the student movement in Quebec.

### **Recommendation:**

While the QSU produces interesting research that the SSMU can make use of, the SSMU should remain an observer member or non-member of the Quebec Student Union until further notice.



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## **La CRUES**

The [Coalition de résistance pour l'unité étudiante syndicale](#) is the newest coalition of student associations in the Quebec student movement. Founded in 2023, the CRUES now represents over 35 000 students from across the province. In contrast to the QSU, the CRUES uses *combative syndicalism* in order to struggle for gains, i.e. by employing the strike tactic.

The CRUES follows on the heels of ASSÉ, the provincial coalition that spearheaded the coordination of the 2012 unlimited student strike. Due to a number of reasons ASSÉ dissolved in 2019, leaving a gap for a new student coalition.

The CRUES holds positions much more in line with those of the SSMU. The coalition openly criticizes reformism, pointing instead to the root causes of systemic issues, and to this extent argues that the QSU's closed-door negotiation efforts undermine the popular mobilization efforts of the coalition.

- See also: [CRUES Positions book \(2024\)](#)

Contrary to the QSU, the CRUES' member associations are largely departmental and faculty student associations. Campus-wide associations are criticized for being too large and relatively undemocratic. Therefore, the SSMU would not be a good fit within CRUES and should not look to affiliate. This sentiment is shared by executives at the Concordia Student Union. However, it should be noted that the mobilization surrounding the most recent tuition hikes has sparked a wave of affiliations within departmental student associations at Concordia. The energy for this mobilization is coming mostly from groups of organized students within associations, referred to as "mobilization committees," that are official instances of their respective student associations.

- See also: [Concordia Geography Undergraduate Students' Society Mobilization Committee](#) ('GUSS Mob')

## **Recommendation:**

The SSMU should support the resurgence of the grassroots student movement. The most meaningful way for the SSMU to contribute to this, at this time, would be by facilitating the participation of student associations at McGill in mobilizing to affiliate to the CRUES. This could include:

- Acting as a point of contact between the CRUES and student associations;
- Assisting in the dissemination of information from CRUES to students on campus;
- Assisting student associations in the creation of mobilization committees;
- Sharing the resources that SSMU readily has access to (room bookings, printer, assorted materials, staff hours);



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- Assisting student association delegates in their participation at CRUES congresses (travel expenses);
- Paying for translation services at CRUES congresses to ensure bilingual accessibility;
- Helping address the CRUES' financial and logistical needs through their current phase of development.

The SSMU could easily address these needs through the Offices of the Vice-President (External Affairs) and by creating a "Student Mobilization Fund" to support the mobilization of student associations towards specific campaigns and affiliation to the CRUES.

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Federal: CASA, CFS, UCRU.

### **CASA and CFS**

The [Canadian Alliance of Student Associations](#) (CASA) and the [Canadian Federation of Students](#) (CFS) are the two main associations operating the student representation & advocacy space. Similar to the examples at the provincial level, CASA adopts the lobbying approach, while CFS positions itself as more combative. Nevertheless, both adopt reformist positions in their work.

SSMU has belonged to both CASA and CFS in the past, and to other national student federations dating as far back as the 1920's. At this time, no discussions have been entertained with either of these student federations regarding a renewed affiliation. In addition, research into SSMU's potential partnership with either of these associations is limited.

- See also: Excerpt from 2014 External Affairs Memo on SSMU's full history of affiliations (to be added)

### **UCRU**

UCRU is the [Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities](#). This coalition of undergraduate student societies from the [U15](#) was formed in 2015 to pose as an alternate option to CASA and CFS.

SSMU has participated in UCRU since 2021 due to a Board resolution for an interim provision to affiliate SSMU to UCRU. Interim provisions normally last 1 year and must be renewed before their expiry. This was never done, and so the SSMU has been unofficially participating within the instances of UCRU since 2022. From 2022-2024, the Vice-President (External Affairs) has participated as a member of the UCRU Board of Directors, as well as on the Research Committee and within the Advocacy team.



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There have been ongoing discussions within the UCRU Board regarding where each association stands on their commitment to the organization. Many of the associations belonging to or observing UCRU are simultaneously observing CASA instances, which has led to widespread feelings of doubt and uncertainty within UCRU. During the 2024 UCRU Lobby Week, it became colloquial to refer to UCRU as a “bargaining chip” which associations can use to negotiate better agreements with CASA.

It has been communicated on behalf of SSMU that the Society wishes to remain, for now, an observer member of UCRU (and perhaps helping develop it further), but that the SSMU has not sought to construct any relationship with CASA or CFS. UCRU, as an organization, faces a number of existential issues and should not be considered stable enough for the Society to affiliate to it by referendum.

### **Issues with UCRU**

After nearly a decade, UCRU remains a fledgling advocacy project. Here are the core issues that UCRU faces as an organization:

- **No finances.** UCRU is entirely funded out-of-pocket by participating student associations. Without the establishment of a fee-levy, UCRU cannot fund campaigns or operations on its own. Costs have been kept to a minimum and are covered each by their own or by the generosity of various student associations. In 2024, the total costs for SSMU’s participation in UCRU were less than \$2,000 for travel expenses.
- **No organizational stability.** The nature of student association executive roles unfortunately means that there is a 100% turnover in participants each year. This leads to a lack of institutional memory, repetition of mistakes and a slowed advancement of the organization. The hiring of an executive director would resolve this.
- **No public presence.** Without a hired communications manager, UCRU struggles to be able to maintain a presence in mainstream media.
- **No political strategy.** UCRU must define itself from CASA and CFS, and therefore must develop a stronger political strategy that will be attractive to potential member associations and differentiate itself from other organizations on the Hill.
- **Elitism.** Is there a serious need for the U15 to be the central tenet of UCRU’s identity? This may prevent meaningful cooperation with most student associations, aside from an exclusive list.

While the above might strongly condemn UCRU as an organization, it remains to be said that not all is lost for UCRU. The above issues *can* be addressed by a passionate and invigorated set of student representatives. Regardless of the existence of UCRU, there will always be a number of unaffiliated student associations looking to cooperate on advocacy projects together. This is how CASA, CFS, and every organization before it has come about.



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A final note: the McGill name is more powerful than UCRU or the U15. A strong percentage of federal MPs have McGill listed as their *alma mater*, or have passed through our campus at one point or another. This should be exploited to the best of our abilities in order to gain meetings with MPs.

### **Recommendation:**

The SSMU should remain an observer member of UCRU over the next few years, at the discretion of the Vice-President (External Affairs) and the President. UCRU has the potential to develop at a low cost, given that enough effort is invested by all parties present.

In addition to this, the Vice-President (External Affairs) should examine the potential of creating a volunteer committee of students interested in lobbying and advocacy work. This committee could help with research, logistics, and policy work (whether with UCRU or independently as SSMU). There exists a demographic of students on this campus wishing to work on the Hill. Gaining experience, making connections, and learning to master their craft as early as possible can be beneficial both to these students and to the Society.

### **Final Notes**

The student association advocacy space is complex and rarely stable. Given this, there is no imperative for the SSMU, as a democratic body representing 24,000 students, to insert itself in advocacy coalitions such as the aforementioned should they not meet our needs or produce results favorable to the SSMU's membership. In this regard, the Society should continue to focus on supporting ongoing efforts at the grassroots level, and may improve its efforts in key areas.

Respectfully submitted,

*Liam Gaither*  
Vice-President (External Affairs) 2023-2024



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