



2017/2018 Gazette Publishing Committee

Thursday, Oct. 19, 2017

4:30 p.m.

USC Boardroom. Call-in details to come

Meeting Two

AGENDA

1. Call to Order
2. Adoption of Agenda
3. Introduction of Sabrina Hundal
4. EIC report
5. Manager Report
6. Letter re: Orientation Coverage
7. Inquiries and Other Business
8. Adjournment of Meeting

Call-in Details: to come in subsequent e-mail from Amy.

Voting Members:

- Jay Menard (chair)
- Ravi Arnath
- Paul Benedetti
- Sydney Scott (USC Board representative)
- Nicole MacAdam
- Sabrina Hundal
- Aron Yeomanson

Editor-in-Chief Report October 2017

General update

Since we met in early August, the editorial board completed three days of journalism training before Western's Orientation Week, and the Frosh Issue magazine hit stands on Aug. 29. The *Gazette's* returned to our once-weekly publication schedule and the hustle of daily deadlines and a full newsroom. Over the course of last month and a half we've prioritized a number of goals, such as creating a system for efficient workflow, hosting a successful recruitment and training the editors to create content that's digital-first. This report will elaborate on some of these points.

As mentioned, a major focus for September was training editors to produce quality, digital-first content that's timely and student-focused. While this will be an ongoing process throughout the year, we spent a lot of time in September getting the editorial board used to a daily deadline. Out of 24 editors, volume 111 only had 9 returning editors; this meant many first-time writing editors not used to end-of-day targets. This was a struggle in the beginning — and it's still not perfect — but toward the end of the month, we were more consistently hitting our targets. FO will continue to push the daily deadline.

Daily newsletter

Helping us meet a daily deadline, is the *Gazette's* new email newsletter that comes out Monday through Friday. We launched the newsletter at the beginning of September, and although it's been a lot of hard work to maintain, I'm thrilled with it. I'm pleased with the newsletter for a few reasons: First, the newsletter has been integral as motivation for editors to meet their daily targets. If an editor doesn't complete a story, there's a tangible effect — a hole in the next morning's newsletter. For this reason, it's really helped get editors into a daily mentality, something we've struggled with over the last few years since losing our nightly print deadline.

Currently, the newsletter includes three news stories, two culture stories, two sports stories and a photo of the day (that we also publish on Instagram). We experimented with a few different send-out schedules and newsletter formats throughout September, but we've settled on an email newsletter that comes out at 7 a.m. Monday to Friday.

While we have about 120 people signed up for the newsletter, I wanted to work out the kinks during September before promoting it. During October, we'll move into a promotional phase on social media and work on attracting more subscribers.

Overall, I'm pleased with the editors' commitment and hard work so far to meeting the daily deadline and producing a consistent newsletter.

Frosh Issue magazine

I'm proud of the work the editorial board put into this year's Frosh Issue magazine, and it had great pick up this year. Stands ran out of the magazine around campus, and we had to redistribute them to meet demand, especially in the University Community Centre. For the first-time in recent memory the issue included two features, and I thought the content and visuals were strong overall. Most of the Frosh Issue content was well-received online and resulted in a lot of engagement with the *Gazette's* Facebook page.

The issue, however, also garnered some negative feedback. The majority of the controversy arose from one piece of content: a one-page graphic that depicted a bingo drinking game called Frosh Slosh.

Many students, especially sophs, RAs and orientation leaders, denounced the piece on Facebook. Several individuals stated the piece promoted binge drinking, unduly pressured underage first-year students and that it served to undermine the work of orientation leaders to promote a safe and dry O-Week. I had one individual directly get in contact with me about his concerns. The *Gazette* received and published two letters to the editor about Frosh Slosh, and a formal complaint was submitted to the Publications Committee.

I understand our readers concerns, and as a student-funded paper, they have every right to voice them. The complaints are coming from student leaders who care about first-year students and who are deeply invested in Orientation Week's success.

With this said, I stand behind my reasons for publishing the drinking game. The drinking game was in line with the *Gazette's* mandate. Our mandate is to reflect the Western undergraduate student experience, and that means reflecting that many first-year students choose to drink during O-Week every year. I think to pretend O-Week is dry would fail our readership, and to only include content in the Frosh Issue that promotes or praises dry O-Week would be disingenuous and inaccurate. As a Western TV video showed later in September, drinking during O-Week is a common experience for first-year students, and the Frosh Issue had to reflect that in some capacity.

Further, our mandate is also to entertain our readers, and in the context of our other Frosh Issue content promoting safe drinking choices, Frosh Slosh is a light-hearted graphic for students' amusement that comments on the fact that, for a significant portion of students, O-Week isn't dry. The *Gazette* is not forcing first-year students to play the game, and I have faith in our readership's intelligence to take the content for what it is — either for their amusement or to ignore. I believe first-year university students are adults capable of critical thinking.

And ultimately, the Frosh Issue was balanced regarding drinking during O-Week. Three pieces of content mentioned drinking, and both articles advocated for safe drinking practices. In "This is How We Party," the author offered tips for staying safe, like staying hydrated, and in the article

on the history of dry O-Week, we pointed out its merits. We made sure to highlight that alcohol-related hospitalizations have dramatically fallen since dry O-Week was enacted in 2006 and that hard liquor isn't required to have fun.

Any total ban is bound to be parodied, especially given the dry O-Week alcohol ban is often ignored. The drinking game did not "advocate" or "endorse" binge-drinking. It's clearly poking fun at dry O-Week, and it's not the *Gazette's* job to either push or fall in line with the official messaging of the University Students' Council or the university administration. Our role is to debate issues affecting the Western community, and I believe the Frosh Slosh drinking game accomplished that. As mentioned, the content was hotly debated on social media with both people for and against it. The drinking game and letters to the editor stand as public records of that debate in September 2017.

Recruitment/Open house

As I mentioned in my August report, stronger *Gazette* recruitment is one of my goals for the year, and September's open house was booming. We advertised the open house in this year's O-Kit, the buss line, through classroom visits and online and in print. In total, we had about 75 people turn out to the open house event, which was phenomenal. We saw a boost in volunteer turnout during the following week, and will continue to watch after Fall Reading Break to determine its impact.

Our next step is to continue to attract contributors and to try and create a program that gives their time at the *Gazette* structure. Our efforts during first semester will complement our major recruitment drive in January with the internship program. Moving forward, we have plans to advertise opportunities to get involved on social media through a series of graphics and videos.

Digital presence

In spirit with continuing to evolve into an online-first media organization, the *Gazette's* been up to a few things. First, Western TV completed a rebrand during September to modernize their overall image. Check out [their Facebook page](#) to see it in action. They also wrapped up recruitment for Season 5, including hiring two first-year reporters (woohoo!).

We're also continuing to experiment with digital storytelling and have had some success with a number of initiatives.

Globe and mail chart tool

Part of creating the design managing editor position was standardizing the *Gazette's* brand across platforms. We're now hosting the Globe and Mail's chart tool on our server, allowing any editor to create standardized, interactive graphs. See [here](#) for an example.

Photo galleries

We're also publishing more photo galleries to Facebook. These are getting a lot of engagement — students love pictures! — and we're getting our photographers to do more reporting. We're experimenting with telling stories through photo galleries via captions. An example is our recent coverage of the ["Broughdale Grandma's" garden reno](#).

Social media

We've moved away from Snapchat this year and are focusing on Instagram live for live reporting. We're creating daily "live stories" that link to Gazette articles, and we're posting the newsletter's daily photo to Instagram, ensuring it has daily content. We've also started to use GIFs on Facebook, although the audience's reaction so far has been indifference.

Conclusion

Overall, I'm impressed with everyone's work ethic and eagerness to learn. The planning FO we did over the summer led to a smoother September than I expected. Our content is entirely focused on campus and post-secondary issues, and we've broken some big stories over the first month that got a lot of engagement and even some copy-cat reporting. I'd like to increase the number of features and original stories in the coming months. Nothing is perfect and we've made mistakes so far, but we're learning and having fun.

Social media stats

Gazette

Facebook Likes

2017

Oct. 18 – 6,252 (+668) Average post reach: 19,668

July 27 – 5,584

2016

Oct. 18, 2016 – 4,268

Jul. 27 – 3,566

Twitter Followers

2017

Oct. 18 – 9,926 (+239)

Jul. 27 – 9,687

Instagram Followers

2017

Oct. 18 – 1,233 (+119)

Jul 27 2017 – 1,114

Western TV

Video content produced (up and until October 15):

Season 4: 5 Videos

Season 5: 17 Videos + 1 LIVE show

Video Views on YouTube:

Season 4: 201K views

Season 5: 443K views

YouTube Subscribers:

Season 4: 700

Season 5: 1,500

Facebook engagement (up and until October 15):

Season 4: 1,100 likes

Season 5: 2,200 likes

To the Publications Committee of the Western Gazette,

In response to recently published articles and video, we are writing to the Committee to voice concerns regarding behaviours the Gazette appears to be endorsing. Although we write this based on our own opinions, and those of our constituents, we wish to make utterly clear that the University Students' Council as a body is in no way attempting to influence the content put out by the Gazette. We are simply concerned students, writing on behalf of other concerned students.

The most problematic articles in question include the "Frosh Slosh" article, a one-page bingo-like game published in the "Frosh Issue" immediately before Orientation Week, which is intended by the University and Orientation Program to be alcohol-free. The article encouraged first-year students to have a drink of alcohol whenever certain events were witnessed, even suggesting they drink until they cannot remember their nights in residence. This encouragement becomes problematic when considering the very-well known statistics that a majority of first-year students are under the legal drinking age, and 92% of students in residence are underage on move-in day, according to the Director of Residence. Continuing to support these unhealthy and widely-illegal habits is extremely concerning and undermines values of campus safety.

The video entitled "How Dry Was Your O-Week?" is another clear example of the lack of attention paid to the issue at hand. Campus media providing a platform for irresponsible and destructive behaviours is baffling. While garnering the attention of students via these methods is the prerogative of the Gazette, we are left wondering whether or not those individuals interviewed were made fully aware of the nature of the video. Though it was the choice of the interviewed students to make, the pedestal the Gazette provides for a culture of excessive drinking both during Orientation Week and within Residence undermines the tireless work Orientation and Residence staff put in to ensure student safety. Promoting the harmful practice can only serve to help normalize it.

In the past, the "Frosh Issue" has come under fire for similar reasons. In 2014, an apology was published by the editorial board for the content in that year's "Frosh Issue" in response to controversy over articles encouraging excessive drinking and drug use, amongst other behaviours. Evidently, this is an ongoing issue, where the current editorial team has failed to consider the previous negative response. Though we respect the decision to publish the negative responses by the USC Executive and a concerned professor to the "Frosh Slosh" article this year, we hope that no further articles of this nature are published.

We implore the Committee to advise the editorial team away from encouraging unsafe and potentially illegal conduct. The Gazette, which is touted as the “official student newspaper” of Western, should accurately reflect the values of the students without promoting harmful behaviour. The articles in question clearly do not, and we would hope that greater discretion will be used in the future.

Respectfully,

Kyle Tang
Faculty of Music Students' Council President

Danny Chang
President, Faculty of Science Students' Council

Massimo Perruzza
President, Faculty of Arts and Humanities Students' Council

Rachel Ogilvie
President, Brescia University College Students' Council

Dylan Matthews
President, Huron University College Students' Council

Emma Coates
President, Faculty of Information and Media Studies Students' Council

Mitchell Pratt
President, Faculty of Social Science Students' Council

Husnain Ali
President, Faculty of Health Sciences Students' Council

Violette Hammad
President, King's University College Students' Council

Elaine Cook
President, Undergraduate Engineering Society

With Endorsement From:

Kate Moran
Arts and Humanities Councillor, University Students' Council

Frank Ye, Graeden Middel, Rakshith Gangireddy, Victoria Barroso, Grace Zhu
Science Councillors, University Students' Council

Riley Garno

President, Faculty of Health Sciences Students' Council (2016-2017)

Khalid Backtash

President, Undergraduate Engineering Society (2016-2017)

Cecilia Liu

Past Residence Soph

Sogand Kashefi

Past Residence Advisor/Past Residence Don