TALIA DIXON'S PLATFORM FOR VP STUDENT LIFE

Land Acknowledgement

This platform was conceptualized and written on Treaty Six territory, land that has been stolen from the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, and Métis nations. These nations and their peoples have lived here since time immemorial. While I am a settler, I am also a Treaty Person, with a deep relationship to the land. I know that I must work every day to learn what being a Treaty person means for me. I also recognize the role that the University and the Students' Union play as colonial institutions in the ongoing process of colonization and rampant colonial violence.

As a student representative, I must play a role in decolonizing these institutions and systems. As an acknowledgement of the land, I am on it is meaningless without action. That is why I have made it a primary goal to fight for Indigenous rights on this campus as so far most of the work towards reconciliation has been led and done by Indigenous students on this campus, and it is time that the Students' Union executive change this.

Finally, I know that the term 'reconciliation' itself has in recent times been highly contested, and for good reason. When I use the term reconciliation, I refer to the commitments I am making: to build meaningful relationships with Indigenous students, student groups, the Aboriginal Students' Council, and with the different nations that our students come from. It is also a continuing commitment to learning what being a Treaty Person means to me, to not be performative, and to not place the workload on Indigenous students while claiming the credit. I want to practice reconciliation that will work for true meaningful change in ways that Indigenous students want and need. Because we are Treaty People, this is not an "Indigenous issue" alone. Resisting colonial violence is all our responsibilities, and I will commit, work, and fight for decolonization every step of the way.

About This Platform

Hi! My name's Talia and Im running to be your next VP Student Life (VPSL)!
I am a fourth year Arts student majoring in Women and Gender Studies and Political Science. For the past four years I have been very involved on campus. I've lived in Lister, worked on campus for the UofAs Sustainability Council, served as an executive for the debate club, been a Team Lead for Sustain SU, worked as President of the International Genetically Engineered Machines competition group and as an activist with Climate Justice Edmonton.
Through these positions I became passionate about making UofA better for all of us. So two years ago I got involved with student governance. Since then I have served as an SU Arts Councillor and member of the Policy, Bylaw, Nominating, Finance and ARRC Committees, and as Chair of the Sustainability Committee. I am also VP Events Finance for the PSUA, Councillor for OASIS, and GFC representative.
I am running for the VPSL position because I know that we deserve more, that's why my platform points are so ambitious because as your VPSL I will leave no one behind in my work to build a better UofA.

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Addressing Sexual Assault on Campus

Why is addressing sexual assault a top priority for me?

Reports by the University of Alberta (UofA) demonstrate that sexual assault affects UofA students both on and off-campus[1,2]. In 2020, hundreds of students came forward to report sexual assaults that had been committed by fellow students and staff members . These events have spotlighted the University's failure to prevent and respond to sexual assault on campus meaningfully.

While the SU's advocacy resulted in hiring the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Coordinator (this position's sole responsibility is to coordinate sexual assault prevention), we still have to do more. We must build on the momentum this win provides by continuing advocacy for and creating initiatives that will prevent sexual assault.
Sexual assault is a violent crime that ruins students' lives, and the impact on survivors ripples throughout their communities, impacting us all. I know that we cannot allow the University to ignore this issue and that we must work to protect students while beginning the healing process for survivors. That's why I have made addressing sexual assault a top priority.
The following three platform points aim to not only prevent sexual assault but provide supports to survivors

1. Creating A Campus-Wide Sexual Assault Prevention Training Program

To prevent sexual assault on-campus, students and staff must be educated on what sexual assault is and how to prevent it. As the 2016 report on sexual assault suggests, this training must focus on consent and bystander intervention[5]. While this training is currently given to specific cohorts of the university, it must be expanded and improved upon so that all students and staff across campus receive this training to make it effective.

As VPSL, I will work with the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Coordinator, University administration and the Assault Centers Education Programmer to ensure that all students and staff on campus receive sexual assault prevention training. If I am unable to develop training for all students and staff during my term, I would focus on creating a pilot program focusing on students living in Residence and those who are a part of Greek Life. This goal is accomplishable as it is currently being done at other universities, including McGill University, where it has demonstrated positive and successful results within its student body.

2. Improving Supports for Survivors

Sexual assault is a pervasive issue at UofA. This means that while fighting for you and your safety, we must prioritize supports for survivors by increasing accessibility to information pertinent to reporting and prevention of sexual assault. Many sexual assault survivors have drawn attention to the fact that the confusing and lengthy reporting process is an additional

burden to an already traumatizing ordeal.

As VPSL, I will continue the work currently in progress to streamline and clarify the reporting process and make it more accessible to students. This will be done by:

- Improving websites that provide students with information about sexual assault and how to report[6]
- Making pre-existing guides more accessible
- Creating reporting guides specifically for Indigenous and International students
- Utilizing social media to distribute this information to students
- Translating this information into various languages, including but not limited to French and Mandarin
- And developing guides for all UofA campuses, including Campus St. Jean and Augustana Campus

I will also work with the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Coordinator, First Peoples' House, the Sexual Assault Center, the Landing and International Student Services to ensure that inclusive support systems are accessible for the entire student body regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or preferred language. This means ensuring that the Sexual Assault Centre provides supports that are inclusive. Improving supports for survivors and making them more accessible will allow survivors to navigate the reporting process with ease and ensure inclusivity and accessibility is prioritized.

3. Preventing and Responding to Sexual Assault in Residence

Resident Assistants (RAs) and other student staff members are often expected to be the first responders to sexual assault. Thus, they play a crucial role in responding to and addressing sexual assault. However, the training RAs currently receive regarding prevention and response to sexual assault is not extensive enough to comprehensively provide them with tools to adequately respond to abuse.

As VPSL, I will fight for RAs to receive the First Responder to Sexual Assault and Abuse Training from Residence Services. This training is much more extensive than the training currently provided, ensuring that all involved stakeholders are adequately supported and trained. If Residence Services does not want to provide this training, as VPSL, I will make it mandatory for Council of Residence Associations (CORA) members so that leaders in Residence are equipped with the tools and knowledge that they need to prevent and appropriately report sexual assault in Residences. I will also make this training open and accessible to all RAs. Providing the First Responder to Sexual Assault and Abuse training will

Improving Mental Health Supports on Campus

Why is mental health a top priority for me?

Every student has either struggled with their mental health or knows someone who has. These issues have only gotten worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, supports provided by the University are inadequate due to a lack of accessibility to support and the inability to meet the complex needs of the entire study body. Starting in my first year I struggled with the issues many other students have, such as unmanageable stress, sadness and feeling overwhelmed. Your mental health matters and as your VPSL, I will ensure that your mental health needs are met by providing you with greater access to resources and supports to improve your well-being. The following four platform points aim to improve our mental health supports on campus to make them comprehensive and inclusive.

1. Making Mental Health Culturally Supportive and Sensitive

Right now, many students across campus find UofA mental health supports inadequate, particularly as they are not culturally supportive[8] or culturally sensitive. As a result, these resources often fall short of meeting the needs of Indigenous students, international students, or ethnic minorities.

As VPSL, I will work to make the PSC culturally supportive and inclusive. To implement this, I will focus on the PSC recruiting volunteers from diverse cultural, spiritual and ethnic backgrounds to broaden the range of services provided by allowing students to access support from students with similar backgrounds. I will also work with the PSC staff to ensure that student volunteers have extensive cultural sensitivity training.

Finally, I will advocate for the University of Alberta's Counseling and Clinical Services to provide mental health support that is culturally inclusive and sensitive which means working to ensure that services are provided in various languages and by councillors who have culturally sensitivity training. Making changes based on cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness to Counseling and Clinical Services will enable more students to access these services.

2. Advocating to Improve Counselling and Clinical Services

Counselling and Clinical Services is a key part of the mental health supports provided on campus. However, various barriers such as limited access to appointments with certified professionals limit the resources' accessibility and effectiveness.As VPSL, I will advocate to the University to extend clinic hours. While operating hours extend to 7:00pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the goal would be to see additional hours on weekdays when the clinic closes at 4:30PM or having supports available on weekends.

This change will be important particularly for practicum and co-op students whose work schedules can render the clinic largely inaccessible to them. I will also work with the University to streamline the booking process, making it easier for students to access the resources they need.

Moreover, I advocate for the creation of a system that allows students to book same-day appointments, as is currently done at the University Health Centre. While these may seem like minor changes, throughout the year these changes could lead to hundreds more students getting appointments.

3. Addressing Mental Health in Residence

Addressing mental health concerns in Residence requires holistic solutions that address residents' specific needs. When I lived in residence, I found it difficult to access mental health supports while living in an environment not conducive to mental wellness. Additionally, friends of mine have been negatively impacted when faced with eviction or strict monitoring threatened against them following mental health crises.

As VPSL, I will fight for two main initiatives that will help to address mental health concerns in residence:

1. I'll work to expand mental health support in Residence by working with the Peer Support Center to develop a pilot program to provide their services in Residences. This program would allow the Peer Support Center to go into various residences at different times in the week to provide easily accessible supports.

2. I will also fight against evictions following self harming and suicide attempts. As it stands, the University has a policy of evicting or moving students when they attempt to self harm or attempt suicide[9]. As VPSL, I will advocate for this policy to be eliminated in favour of developing a support framework that aims to help students struggling with their mental health, and create interim solutions to protect these students without relocating or evicting them.

These platform points will help students in Residence access the support they need while ensuring that Residence is a safe place for students struggling with mental health crises.

4. Creating a Mental Health Awareness Campaign

This year the Students Union began providing a program called Empower Me, this program allows students who are covered by the SU Comprehensive Care or Basic Care Health and Dental Plan to access additional mental health and wellness supports including crisis response psychology, psychotherapy, and much more.

This program is accessible to all students 24/7 in 22 countries around the world. This means that many international students who are currently abroad due to COVID can access these supports. However this service is new and very underutilized.

As VPSL, I will work to ensure that mental health funding is not cut from the plan when we renegotiate it next year, and I will create a mental health awareness campaign focusing on Empower Me so familiarize students with services that are already accessible to them. Moreover, this mental health campaign should focus on mental health issues that are often ignored including excessive alcohol and drug use, eating disorders and much more.

Hosting Meaningful Events

Why are events important?

Events are a vital part of creating an inclusive campus culture where students do more than learn and study but build lasting connections that help them through hard times.

Starting in my first year, I got very involved on campus and attended many events which introduced me to my friends and helped me build a support network, which lead to me getting involved on campus. I want to make sure that other students have access to the same opportunities, particularly as COVID restrictions have limited our abilities to host and attend events. This lack of events has been particularly detrimental for thousands of first and second-year students who haven't had the full university experience.

As your VPSL, I will work hard to develop fun community-based events that bring us all together during and after COVID. The following three platform points have been developed with that in mind:

1. Hosting RezFest

RezFest was conceptualized as a concert fundraiser that would allow those living in and outside of residence to have fun while having numerous positive impacts on improving residents mental health, community engagement, and life on campus. However, it was cancelled two years in a row. First, due to an outbreak of gastrointestinal illnesses than due to COVID.

As VPSL, I will work to make RezFest 2022 happen if COVID guidelines permit. The interest already exists and so I will accomplish this goal by creating a planning committee of Presidents and VPs of Residence associations, who will be the financial and planning partners to make the project a reality. As VPSL, I will make events such as RezFest a priority to ensure your time as a student is both fun and exciting.

2. Making Events and Programming Sustainable

The Students' Union creates large amounts of waste through our programming, services, and events. We must make the environment a priority which means committing to a Zero Waste SU. One of the best ways to do so is by incorporating these practices into our events, especially large events like Week of Welcome (WOW), so that we can be environmentally sustainable while allowing students to have fun and enjoy events.I am confident that we can accomplish this goal because around the world, new standards are being set for large events, programs, and services to be zero waste.

The Banff Marathon, where I was the Chair of Sustainability, is an example of this. With thousands of attendees, this event is now 100% waste free. This process is simple: work to divert waste from the planning phase, with waste diversion during and after the event.

As VPSL, I will work within the SU to create an event waste diversion plan to implement radical waste diversion. This will become integral to SU events regardless of size, ensuring that they are 100% waste-free, from planning to clean up. Once we succeed in this, it will also become much easier to push the University to match our achievements.

3.Creating Aboriginal Awareness Week

The Aboriginal Relations & Reconciliation Committee (ARRC) recommendations call on the SU to host an Aboriginal Awareness Week similar to the one held by the University of Calgary (UofC).

As VPSL, I will work with the Aboriginal Students Council, Indigenous students-at-large, First Peoples' House and Indigenous communities in the surrounding area to create Aboriginal Awareness Week. This event should be focused on "bringing students together to learn more about Aboriginal Peoples in Canada" .

Not only will this event further reconciliation on campus but will serve all students including international students who often ask for events that allow them to learn more about Indigenous cultures and histories. Thus, this event will holistically help build relationships with Indigenous students and learn more about the Treaty 6 Land.

Moreover, I will work to ensure that incorporating Indigenous programming into all SU events.

Fighting for Students in Residence

What's the issue with residence?

When I lived in Lister Centre, the problems in Residence were similar to the ones today. There were massive problems with deferred maintenance, it was too expensive to live there, programming was being cut, and the meal plan was a massive concern for many students. Despite continued advocacy from students and the SU, these issues and many others continue to go unaddressed. Not only does this make students in Residence feel unimportant but it also means that many students (myself included) get fed up and move out.
Issues affecting those in Residence have been addressed throughout this platform, these two points have also been developed specifically for those in Residence.

1. Lowering the Cost of Residence and Making it Worth Your Money

The cost of living in Residence is rising every year while the value of Residence is not increasing, making it inaccessible to most students. This problem has arisen for two main reasons:

The first reason is that Residence Services is unable to adequately find enough students who can afford or are willing to pay their high prices. This leaves floors partially empty, the cost of keeping those rooms empty is than displaced on to students.

The second reason is because the UofA continues to build new and expensive residences that have costly mortgages that they cannot afford without filling residences completely. The cost of these mortgages are then displaced onto students, so residents pay for the University's mortgages in high-vacancy buildings, while seeing no rise in service or space quality.

As VPSL I will advocate to the University to decrease Residence rates by focusing on filling rooms that cost less. Pushing for this solution leads to better residences than the current model. Moreover, students don't want to live on half empty floors, ensuring a higher occupancy will allow residents to experience a vibrant sense of community and resources.

Finally, while the cost of Residence is increasing, the quality of services are not. To address this I will advocate for the University to offer more and better programming and services. This includes but is not limited to hosting more meaningful and engaging events and keeping shared spaces clean. Residence Services is unable to do so, I will explore ways in which the SU can fill these gaps and provide high quality programming, either by supporting Residence Associations, or by providing it directly from the Students' Union.

2. Revolutionizing the Meal Plan

The University of Alberta currently contracts the majority of its food services with Aramark. They are a multimillion dollar company that provides food not only to universities but to prisons where they have been embroiled in multiple scandals[11], triggering many companies and universities to divest from and stop using the company's services[12]. Aramark's purpose is not to serve students, but rather to make large profits.

This impacts all students who eat on campus but is particularly problematic in certain University residences where students are forced to pay thousands for unethical, subpar food and have no substantial choice in what their meal plan looks like and can't access the food they need. In the 2019, Lister Meal Plan Satisfaction survey it was found that the majority of students found "that the quality of food in the Lister Cafeteria has remained execrable [extremely bad or unpleasant] under the new meal plan"[13]. Inside and outside of residence we all deserve sustainable, high quality, cost effective food options.

In 2012, Concordia University launched the Concordia Food Coalition. Facing similar issues as we do, they utilized a community-based approach to make food available for students that met their complex needs. Their goal was simple:

"The Concordia Food Coalition... is concerned about the... implications of the food system at Concordia University. The CFC brings together students, faculty and staff to promote and facilitate a transition to a more sustainable food system in collaboration with organizations at Concordia and beyond". This is what I hope to accomplish at UofA.

As VPSL, I will begin the work to create a Food Coalition. This Food Coalition would serve as a student-focused approach to meal plans; as meal plan negotiations will be happening in 2023 - their main goal would be to build a campaign against forced mandatory meal plans by Residence Services and depart from Aramark. While advocating for food that is economically and environmentally sustainable, while remaining high quality, nutritious, and affordable across campus.It is also important that our meal plan accommodates for students various dietary restrictions by making vegan, Halal, Kosher and many other options widely available.

Making Campus Inclusive

What does it mean to make campus more inclusive?

As we all know, students do more than simply attend school on campus. Thousands of us live here and all of us build our lives around UofA. I have been lucky to build a community here. I think UofA is an amazing place with a vibrant community, particularly as the SU has worked hard to develop inclusive programming. That being said, we should continue to work to make our campus inclusive to all members of our community. The following four platform points work to make UofA a more inclusive campus for all.

1. Increasing Childcare Options on Campus - Creating The Family Lounge

As VPSL, I will work with students who are parents to create the Family Lounge. The Family Lounge Project aims to rectify the fact that the "U of A is not a very family-friendly place", with the creation of a multi-purpose family room. This space will help students who parent by providing a space that is just for them and their families.

This space is envisioned as a safe(r) place where parents can breastfeed, store their milk, feed their children, study, and much more. The Student Parents on Campus Group also plans to organize volunteer shifts so one parent can care for each other's kids while they study, take an exam, or go to work.

I will ensure that the space needed for this lounge is acquired and help ensure that this project is sustainable. The goal is to establish a partnership where the SU administers the Family Lounge, so that it continues in years to come.

2. Advocating for the Creation of More Religious and Spiritual Spaces on Campus

There is limited space for prayer on our campus. While there is a Multi-Faith space in HUB, it is
very small and unable to accommodate large groups. This lacking space disproportionately impacts Muslim students who are stuggling to find a space large enough for prayer on Fridays (Jumu'ah). As a result the Muslim Students Association (MSA) often has to host prayer in campus gyms, which are not suitable particularly as the MSA must pay rent to access these gyms. There is also a lack of smaller appropriate spaces across campus that allow students to pray between classes with ease.

As VPSL I will work with different faith based groups, and University Administration on campus to advocate for the creation of a new Multi-Faith space on campus that is large enough to accommodate large gatherings. In the interim, I will work to make it easier for all faith groups to access spaces on campus and work to make smaller appropriate spaces for prayer across campus accessible. This will make campus a more inclusive space for everyone regardless of their faith.

3. Creating a Pronoun Campaign

While many LGBTQIA+ people (myself included) feel safe on campus, there are still many for whom discrimination is a regular occurance, making them feel exlcuded or as though campus is an unsafe space. Misgendering of students, staff, and faculty both accidentally and on purpose is one large issues on campus. This usually happens when people assume an individual's pronouns.

A way to prevent this is by increasing knowledge on campus about what pronouns are and how to use them. Right now the Landing works to promote the use of pronouns in and outside of the classroom[15].

As VPSL, I will build off the work of the Landing and work with SU's VP Academic to create a campus wide campaign focused on respecting individuals' pronouns. Taking inspiration from multiple campaigns of a similar nature[16], this campaign will focus on creating promotional materials that encourage students to not assume others' pronouns. I will also work to ensure that this extends to the classroom, to ensure that professors also know not to assume an individual's

4.Providing Sustainable Menstrual Products on Campus

Countless students across campus menstruate and many of us who do know are incredibly expensive and often inaccessible they are on campus when one might desperately need them.

Students shouldn't have to worry about being able to access menstrual products on campus. For the past two years, the Students' Union has been working hard to provide free menstrual products across campus and while extensive work has been done to make this dream a reality, this project is still far from complete.

As VPSL, I will continue the work done by previous executives to provide free menstrual products across campus. Traditional menstrual products however are not sustainable and I will work to provide menstrual products that are made of sustainable products and are biodegradable to ensure that this project works towards SU's potential goal of achieving zero waste.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Thank you so much for reading my platform, I hope that at least one of my points spoke to you! Of course there are many other issues on this campus which were not included in this platform that does not however mean that they are unimportant to me or that I will not work to address them during my time as VPSL.

If you have questions or comments about anything in this platform please reach out to me on social media!

@Talia4VPStudentLife **www.VoteForTalia.com**

Thank You

CITATIONS

1. Review of the University of Albertas Response to Sexual Assault 2016 https://bit.ly/3qlgmEa

2. Review of the University of Albertas Response to Sexual Assault 2017 https://bit.ly/3qfQSb2

3. Alix Kemp: Naming My Rapist, Day 2
https://medium.com/@alixkemp/naming-my-rapist-day-2-822c89966fd

4. The Gateway: Notes from council: students to shoulder cost of sexual violence prevention coordinator https://bit.ly/3nELCfn

5. Review of the University of Albertas Response to Sexual Assault 2016 https://bit.ly/3qlgmEa

6. The UofAs Sexual Violence Information and Resources site
https://www.ualberta.ca/campus-life/sexual-violence/index.html

7. Science News: The COVID-19 pandemic made U.S. college students' mental health even worse
https://www.sciencenews.org/article/covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic-us-college-students-mental-health#:~:text=About%2085%20percent%20of%20college,knew%20someone%20with%20COVID%2D19.

8. "Cultural safety, as defined by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, "is grounded in indigenous knowledge and experience, and is based on the recognition of cultural diversity and the influence that social inequalities and imbalances of power have on relationships between the service provider and service user." (ARRC Report Page 10)

9. CBC: 'I couldn't believe it': University of Alberta evicted student after attempt to kill himself
https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/university-of-alberta-suicide-residence-1.4996649

10. ARRC Report Page 30

11. Investigate: https://investigate.afsc.org/company/aramark

12. Investigate: https://investigate.afsc.org/company/aramark

13. 2019, Lister Meal Plan Satisfaction survey

14. Concordia Food Coalition Site: https://www.concordiafoodcoalition.com/

15. The Landing: https://www.su.ualberta.ca/services/thelanding/learn/pronouns/

16. No Big Deal Campaign: https://www.nbdcampaign.ca/