

Students Nova Scotia 2012-13 Annual Report

Presented by Kyle Power, Chair, on July 15, 2013

The 2012-2013 year was a period of profound transition for Students Nova Scotia, indeed that was not even the name of the organization in July of 2012. Our successes and the continued support of our membership have allowed StudentsNS to undergo a significant transformation giving us more resources to more effectively advocate on behalf of students. We have continued to work towards a Post- Secondary education system with *is: accessible, affordable, of the highest quality, and involves the student voice at all levels of decision making and governance*; adding our fourth pillar, regarding student voice this year, further reflecting our expanding focus as an organization. Our expansion allowed for the addition of two more full time staff positions to Home Office and in August we were proud to welcome Brian Foster as our Director of Engagement, and Bob Parker as our Director of Research. These dedicated staff, in addition to our Executive Director Jonathan Williams, were instrumental in our successes.

This report is a detailed accounting of the activities and successes of StudentsNS in the 12/13 year. The Board of Directors identified five priorities in the 2012-13 Annual Plan:

- Re-branding and website renewal
- Advocacy
- Research and policy development
- Engagement
- Strategic planning

This annual report will first present StudentsNS' results, then our activities corresponding to the Annual Plan's five priorities.

Overview of StudentsNS 2012-13 Results:

1. Increase in the grant-loan ratio from 35-65 to 40-60 at a cost of \$1.9 million and for a maximum individual student benefit of \$308 per year.
2. Increase in the maximum assistance amount by \$10/week to \$180/week at a cost of \$2.7 million and for a maximum individual student benefit of \$340 per year.
3. The Nova Scotia Minimum Wage remains tied to the Low-Income Cut-Off and increases \$0.15 to \$10.30, the highest rate in Canada.
4. Province commits to review health services on campuses (more details to come).
5. Students Nova Scotia successfully opposed a CONSUP-led study with funding from the Department of Health and Wellness, which would have been inaccurate and therefore a waste of \$50,000 in public money, and unethical in misrepresenting student health behaviours and knowledge in possibly

- stigmatizing ways. The money was redirected into a better project: an environmental scan of food provision on campuses.
6. Students win representation on the Quality, Access and Affordability, and International Students Working Groups in the Provincial Government-Universities Partnership process.
 7. SMUSA members voted approximately 75% in favour of full membership in Students Nova Scotia.

Rebranding and website renewal activities

StudentsNS, as it was transitioning from its from its past identity as The Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations (ANSSA) undertook a significant rebranding effort with the help of Halifax based design firm Kula Partners, in an effort to enhance its brand visibility and digital presence. It was hoped that the outcome of the rebranding would be heightened visibility among students, decision makers, and the broader public. The following are results related to the rebranding:

- The organization renamed itself Students Nova Scotia (Association) and should be completing the legal aspects of this process very soon.
- The organization's new name is being consistently used in the media and among students, government and university representatives, partner organizations and politicians.
- The organization has built a new website that is attractive, professional, and functional.
- The organization has built a new brand, including word-mark, letterhead, report templates, etc. and purchased a number of brand assets to carry forward into future years.
- The organization has completed a review of all its internal governance policies, which have been reviewed and approved by an outside expert.
- All the organization's internal governance policies, meeting minutes, plans, budgets, reports and audits are now available on the website.

Advocacy

StudentsNS is an advocacy organization built to find constructive, evidence-based solutions to issues facing students, and to bring these solutions to the attention of key decision-makers in civil society and government. With increased resources in the 12/13' year, the organization aimed to have even more impact on policies affecting the Post- Secondary system.

- Students Nova Scotia presented its priorities to the full Partnership in bi-annual meetings.
- Students Nova Scotia presented its recommendations to the Funding Formula Working Group under the Partnership.
- Students Nova Scotia participated in the Quality and Research Working Groups under the Partnership.
- Students Nova Scotia has participated in Student-Government Roundtables with the Membership.
- Students Nova Scotia prepared and communicated a pre-budget submission, and the Province implement two of the submission's three recommendations.
- Students Nova Scotia circulated a pre-election document to the parties identifying our priorities.

- Students Nova Scotia assisted the Dalhousie Student Union through the process of consultations surrounding the university's 2013-14 budget
- Students Nova Scotia assisted the StFX Students' Union during a faculty strike.
- Students Nova Scotia and its members announced a boycott of all "consultations" that could be used to justify new ancillary fees or unwarranted increases to the cost of current fees.
- Students Nova Scotia supported SMUSA's opposition to a proposed athletics fee.
- Students Nova Scotia prepared a letter of support for renewed funding to ISIS' Pilot Project providing extensive employment preparation to international students and graduates.
- Students Nova Scotia attended the Annual General Meetings of the three primary political parties.
- Students Nova Scotia maintained regular contact with public servants.
- Students Nova Scotia prepared a submission to the MPHEC as it reviews its quality assurance process, and also had a representative attend relevant meetings.
- Students Nova Scotia called on the HRM to not only finance transit improvements through increased fares, but also through public contributions.

Research and Policy Development

Aided by our increased resources, StudentsNS endeavored to produce research papers on the most pressing public policy problems facing students of a quality rivaling the leading policy work on Post- Secondary issues. The organization's increased capacity was to be complemented by increased feedback from students, to make sure our work is reflective of the needs of our members.

- Students Nova Scotia released its Position Paper on accountability and how funding is distributed among Nova Scotia's universities: "Getting the Most from Our Universities, A New Approach to System Planning and Funding in Nova Scotia" in January.
- Students Nova Scotia completed a Position Paper on Student Fees and System Funding in April 2013: "Fairness in Nova Scotia University Funding: Who Pays and How Much?"
- Students Nova Scotia completed a Position Paper on International Students in April 2013: "International Students and the Future of Nova Scotia's Universities".
- Students Nova Scotia conducted a comprehensive review of fees charged at Nova Scotia public post-secondary institutions.
- Students Nova Scotia built a new research process to institutionalize board input, student consultations and workflow.
- Students Nova Scotia participated in the steering committee for a proposed CONSUP health study. When it became clear that the project's methodology would not be acceptable, we actively opposed the project. We then helped draft the terms of reference for the subsequent alternative study, an environmental scan of food options on campuses.
- Students Nova Scotia did not complete a number of reports prioritized in the 2012-13 Annual Plan, including notably reports on student health and employment for the month of March, due to resource/time constraints on staff. Students Nova Scotia is on pace to complete work on seven of the ten priorities identified in the 2012-13 Annual Plan by October 2013.

Engagement

Engagement is essential to the work of StudentsNS. Without broad and consistent engagement with students and other stakeholders in the PSE system, this organization would not have the legitimacy or momentum needed to influence decision-makers and the public. In addition to the internal changes at StudentsNS, including the rebrand, the organization designed and implemented multiple initiatives to build dialogue.

- Students Nova Scotia ran an information campaign at SMU and won a referendum for the students' association to move to full membership.
- Students Nova Scotia added a new member, the Dalhousie Agriculture Students Association.
- Students Nova Scotia staff participated in student assemblies on all member campuses. The organization secured \$8000 from Democracy 250 to help finance these events.
- Students Nova Scotia expanded its social media reach significantly, surpassing 1000 Twitter followers.
- Students Nova Scotia maintained a consistent media presence on a range of issues affecting students, comprising approximately 70 media hits over the course of the year.
- Students at SMU implemented Students Speak Out interviews with Students Nova Scotia support.
- Students Nova Scotia supported HRM member associations' work around the municipal election.
- Students Nova Scotia helped the Acadia Students' Union to secure more than \$7000 in funding and run a Student Wellness Conference discussing Mental Health and Alcohol Consumption. The event received excellent evaluations from participants. This represents the organization's priority work towards building an advocacy and awareness campaign on this issue.
- Students Nova Scotia representatives attended the Association of Atlantic Universities' Mental Health Conference at Mount Allison.
- Students Nova Scotia secured \$10,000 from Democracy 250 to run its Mend the Gap Campaign, encouraging and supporting women's interest in student politics. Events were hosted at Acadia, SMU and MSVU, and posters were displayed on most member campuses.
- Students Nova Scotia explored possible collaboration with the NSCCSA at length.
- Students Nova Scotia, with the help of volunteers, implemented Students Speak Out! interviews on campus at SMU but still needs to process the interviews to make them available online.
- StudentsNS marginally expanded its volunteer networks, empowering students to work on the Mend the Gap campaign, Students Speak Out!, student assemblies and the information campaign at SMU.

Strategic Planning

At StudentsNS, strategic plans provide an overarching, multi-year direction to which the organization can refer as it shapes its yearly initiatives. Creating a new strategic plan was a key priority in 2012-13.

- Students Nova Scotia completed a 2013-16 Strategic Plan in April 2013, identifying six priority areas for action moving forward.