

State of the ASG Address
Kyle Bohland
11/8/2006

Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the second annual State of the ASG Address.

If we have not already met, my name is Kyle Bohland and I am the President of Associated Student Government. I am currently a junior majoring in Economics and have been the student body president for a little over six months now. Before elected to the presidency, I was the senate chair and a freshman senator.

Over the past two years, it has been an honor to serve in student government, especially as president. In this capacity, I have the privilege of representing nearly 20,000 undergraduate students on matters ranging from the Coca-Cola scarcity on campus to rising tuition costs. I have the honor of regularly meeting with our president, provost, and other members of our administration. I also have the opportunity to meet with many faculty members, staff, and community members. Most importantly though, I get to make a difference in the lives of my fellow students.

The State of the ASG Address is an event designed to give the student body and the university community a better grasp of what Associated Student Government is doing to make a difference and how we are going to continue to improve our organization and The University of Akron.

Over the past two years, ASG has made many organizational changes allowing us to flourish and function as a much more effective student government. We have a new constitution and bylaws that restructure how we operate and represent students. This has allowed us to grow immensely over the past two years.

What I think has still been missing, however, is a comprehensive look at what a student government is actually supposed to be doing, and what our role is on campus. I started researching this question when I ran for ASG president last spring and I will present to you today what has evolved into seven distinct roles that student governments should assume. After I present these responsibilities, I will discuss how ASG is tackling them, and how we can improve for the future.

I believe these responsibilities to be as follows:

- 1) Represent the interests and concerns of the student body to the faculty, staff, and administration,
- 2) Represent the student's voice to local, state, and national lawmakers,
- 3) Serve on campus-wide committees comprised of students, faculty, staff, and administrators,
- 4) Provide resources and services to students,
- 5) Work with student organizations by registering them, distributing EAF money, and offering support to them on a regular basis,
- 6) Enhance the student experience by promoting expression, leadership, and professionalism among members of ASG and the rest of the student body, and finally
- 7) Stimulate civic awareness, cultural diversity, and institutional pride throughout the campus and community.

Represent the interests and concerns of the student body to the faculty, staff, and administration.

I'll start with what is ASG's most fundamental responsibility: representing

students' interest and concerns to various parties on campus. This happens in a number of ways, but first and foremost, I meet with the President and Provost at least once a month to discuss student concerns. Other student government members and myself also meet with other members of the administration on a regular basis to ensure representation.

The ASG constitution mandates that two members of student government serve on the Faculty Senate. This year, a justice, Faith Wally, and myself are serving on the Faculty Senate. I have also been given the privilege of being the first student to serve on the Faculty Senate's Executive Committee. This allows me to work even closer with the faculty and have a greater impact on many academic matters.

In the state of Ohio, every state school is mandated to have two student Board of Trustee members. The year marks the first year that both student trustees are also student government members. Indeed, students should rest assured that they are well represented in all aspects of university governance.

ASG's success in representing students is contingent upon the support ASG receives from the student body as a whole. Whether dropping by our office to tell us about a problem, emailing us a suggestion, or simply voting in a general election, the support not only gives us credibility, but also gives us the motivation to keep working.

ASG needs to continue to build strong relationships with faculty, staff, and the administration, and we must also continue to reach out to students. Many students still do not know about ASG or what we do. Our job will not be done until every single undergraduate student knows ASG's role and meaning, and how to reach us.

Represent the student's voice to local, state, and national lawmakers.

Representing students to various government entities is an important responsibility of student government. The most common complaint that ASG receives from students is that tuition is too expensive. Although the University is continually taking action to lower the cost of attendance, and working on giving the students the best education for their money, they do not have the power to significantly lower tuition. That power belongs primarily to the state government.

Because tuition is so closely tied with the state government it is natural that ASG has worked closest with those lawmakers as opposed to the federal and local governments. Over the past two years, ASG has helped to plan and participate in three “Day at the Statehouse” events in Columbus. These are days where state and private schools go to the capitol building to discuss higher education with their lawmakers. These events have been very successful in building relationships, but we still need to work on lobbying more specific policy proposals to make higher education more affordable for Ohioans.

The newly elected state lawmakers will convene in the new general assembly in January. Soon after that, they will start on the state budget process that will have to be passed this summer. This is a crucial process, because it will decide how much funding state institutions receive and could even mark bigger changes that only time will tell. It will be important for us to collaborate with other student governments, from across the state, to concentrate our lobbying effort on the most important issues, in order to make the greatest impact. I have been working hard with the Inter-University Council of Ohio to strengthen our coalition and will be meeting with other student government leaders next week during this year’s Day at the Statehouse.

Although I believe that our lobbying efforts should always be concentrated on the state government, I also think that ASG could be working closer with the city of Akron and should be more closely monitoring the federal government's activities. The federal government is the largest distributor of financial aid, so we have a lot of interest in what goes on at that level. Recently, Margaret Spellings has accepted the recommendations of her Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Some of these recommendations are very drastic and must be monitored by the student government so we know how they will affect students in the future.

Serve on campus-wide committees made up of students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

As student leaders, ASG is constantly tapped to serve on many campus-wide committees. It is a privilege to serve on these committees, because much of the influence that ASG has comes from serving on these very important committees. This is a list of the committees that a representative from ASG has served on since the summer or is currently serving on:

- 1) University Budget Committee
- 2) The Student Discipline and Law Enforcement Policy Review Commission
- 3) Search Committees (Chief Diversity Officer, Director of the Institute for Teaching and Learning, and the Director of the Office of Student Judicial Affairs)
- 4) Student Success and Retention Committee
- 5) First Year Experience Task Force
- 6) Student Fee Structure Task Force
- 7) Conference on Undergraduate and Graduate Research Committee

- 8) University Council Exploratory Committee
- 9) Learning Commons Planning Team for the library
- 10) Provost's Operations Advisory Committee, and
- 11) Academic Policies Committee

The challenge that ASG faces when carrying out this responsibility is to continue to offer new and innovative ideas. These ideas most often come from simply being prepared, but also come from networking with other students and reaching out to the student population for ideas. We have a tremendous amount of talent in our student body that is drastically underutilized when it comes to running this University. I intend to continue to advocate the use of student resources to not only help our students gain valuable experience, but to help lower costs for the University as well.

Provide resources and services to students.

To effectively work for the students, ASG must be certain that students have all the resources and services on campus in order to succeed and graduate. Whether ASG is looking for gaps in current services, advocating for new services, giving input on how to make services better, or providing our own resources and services to students, ASG is always looking into ways to enhance the student experience.

On average, Ohioans graduate with about \$19,000 worth of debt. Students need to have an incredible amount of responsibility in order to manage this kind of debt. Tonight ASG has a speaker coming to campus to present a financial fitness seminar. ASG members are also looking into offering a more comprehensive and permanent financial literacy program to offer continued financial management support to students.

Another long standing service that ASG offers students is the ability to appeal

parking tickets. ASG also is currently looking into providing memorial services to colleagues and family members of university students that pass away.

In my opinion, the biggest challenge for our student government when carrying out this responsibility is to consolidate resources that already exist and place these resources in a single, accessible place. There are two ways in which this can be accomplished. Firstly, we can better organize the University's website so items are much easier to find. ASG will definitely be working closely with our Chief Information Officer to help move this process along and be sure that the end product is something that better serves the students.

Another way we can serve the students is to create a student handbook. This manual would be a one stop shop for everything a student would need to know to find success at The University of Akron. This would allow all students to have access to the same excellent information that we all know is out there, but is just too hard to locate.

Work with student organizations by registering them, distribution EAF money, and offering support on a regular basis.

Probably the most visible role most student governments play throughout the nation is to be in charge of registering new student organizations and allocating money to student organizations. Currently, ASG distributes more than \$700,000 in Extracurricular Activities Funds to about 150 of our 200+ student organizations.

ASG is also able to register new student organizations. Currently, ASG has recognized three new student organizations this semester. These organizations will add to the growing number of leadership and engagement opportunities on campus.

Our challenge as we move ahead into the annual EAF process and as more

student organizations are seeking to be recognized, is to make both processes easier and more convenient for students.

Enhance the student experience by promoting expression, leadership, and professionalism among its members and the rest of the student body.

Although leadership can be found in all facets of the university, student government most often serves as a focal point for student leadership. Because we are a focal point for student leadership, it is important that we hold ourselves to the highest level of accountability and professionalism. In doing this, we hope to exemplify leadership and professional qualities to the rest of the student body.

Also with the responsibility of providing that focal point for student leadership, it is important to note that it is our function to help the university achieve its mission, while keeping the best interests of all students a priority. While we, together with the rest of the university, strive to achieve this mission, we will always aim to encourage expression by students, especially by inviting anyone to our senate meetings every week and allocating a special time for “open student expression”.

Major ethical charges against current politicians and the huge CEO scandals of late, have shown us that it is more important than ever to promote leadership, professionalism, and the freedom of expression. ASG must work to find new ways to promote these aspects of the campus possibly through awards, seminars, or campus discussions.

Stimulate civic awareness, cultural diversity, and institutional pride throughout the campus and community.

Civic awareness, diversity, and pride. Although these three things may seem very

distinct and independent from one another, I feel that they all have one thing in common: these three phenomenons all contribute to making this university interesting. From getting people to be civically engaged, to encouraging people with different backgrounds to interact, all the way to cheering on the Zips in a sporting event, it is important that all three of these aspects of the university are flourishing, because these things are what make college more than just classes.

ASG has been registering people to vote, has held a “Rock the Ballot” event, and has been encouraging students to become poll workers. These efforts have been formidable, but statistics show that we have an uphill battle when it comes to promoting civic engagement. Even though students are currently volunteering at all time highs (at about 75%), political engagement activities are at all time lows, declining fastest among college graduates. This comes at a time when more and more people are participating in higher education. This suggests that a disconnect exists between the government and college students, because although we know that students will put the time into volunteering, by in large, they will not put the time into being politically engaged.

This year ASG incorporated the “Director of Diversity” into the executive branch. Carolyn Gandy, the current Director of Diversity, has been working hard to make a meaningful impact on campus. She has been working with student organizations that concentrate on diverse issues on campus and is also currently working on a student “Diversity Audit” with a few senators, and will be creating a diversity newsletter next semester. I am excited to see where this position goes, especially since inclusive excellence has become a priority of the university.

The last part of this responsibility of student government is to stimulate

institutional pride. Although institutional pride may be a difficult thing to measure, that should not make us shy away from trying to achieve it. I know the ASG Senate Chair Derek Feuerstein, always makes fun of me because I wear my Zippy tie a lot; and of course I am wearing that today! Every time I go into Dr. Proenza's office, I am always jealous of the large stuffed kangaroos he has sitting around.

It is very important for students to have institutional pride. When students are more prideful of their university, I believe they would be more inclined to go to class, want to graduate on time, and want to contribute back to the university. Although it is mainly the university that affects students, students can also have great affects on the university. ASG must continue and strengthen our efforts of encouraging students to give back to the university.

There is much work to be done in instilling institutional pride throughout our student body and encouraging diversity, but I believe our biggest challenge lies in trying to encourage more students to become civically engaged.

Other Projects

While living up to our responsibilities, members of ASG initiate many projects that we work tirelessly on to see through. I have only touched on a few projects so far, so I will read a list of some other projects that ASG is actively pursuing to help the student body.

- Increase the full-time credit hour cap from 15 credits to something more fair for students while at the same time promoting a more timely graduation,
- Improve general education requirements,
- Increase the allocation of the Extracurricular Activities Fund for student organizations,
- Petition Chipotle or other food establishments of interest to our students to establish additional restaurants near campus,
- Bring the *New York Times* Readership Program to campus,

Expand Zipcard acceptance to more off campus locations,
Continue "campus walkabouts" to identify campus safety problem areas and implement a plan for the improvement of those areas,
Hold a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) Clinic, to help students fill out the document (tentatively January 24th from 6 to 7:30 p.m. in Ballroom A)
Improve and expand the campus recycling program, and
Work with Parking Services and the Administration to improve the parking situation on campus.

Conclusion

Throughout this address I have discussed what I believe student government should be doing, what we are doing to meet those responsibilities, and what challenges we face as we move forward. Throughout this address I have attempted to inform the student body and the university community what your student government's role is on campus, so we can be further utilized and be held to the highest level of accountability.

As you can see with the many responsibilities and challenges I have laid out, our work ahead is indeed challenging and sometimes overwhelming. But, it is definitely exciting. Being in student government is a privilege, especially at this university at this time, when we are moving ahead so well.

Allow me to finish today by offering a challenge. So often I hear; we need to educate people for the new changing global economy. Granted this is true, but was the world not changing when the Roman Empire fell? Or when the new world was discovered, when the U.S. Constitution was signed, or when the world went through two world wars in just over thirty years? My point is that the world is constantly changing, so instead of asking ourselves how do we prepare students for *this* changing world, we should be asking ourselves; how do we prepare students for an *ever* changing world or an *ever* changing economy? I think that is the question that defines us.

Thank you very much for being here today. I would be pleased to answer any

questions that you may have.