

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) hosted a conference from June 6th-June 10th, 2022. Titled “Foundations 2022”, this week-long event was the first in-person conference hosted by the federal advocacy group in two years and was a way to welcome new delegates from member schools. It can be seen as an on-boarding program that helped new delegates learn:

- What CASA is and the work it does?
- The importance of advocating for student needs on a federal level.
- Prioritizing the issues that matter to our student members over the next year in order to advocate effectively.

Another advantage of this conference was the networking aspect. It allowed for delegates from our student union to connect with passionate student leaders from around the country, learn about the work being done at the various schools and bounce ideas off each other. There were 22 member schools attending from various provinces across the country.

The five delegates that attended this session on behalf of CSI were:

- ◇ President- Sana Banu
- ◇ Vice President- Nelson Chukwuma
- ◇ Director- Kartik Pawha
- ◇ Director- Fatir Raza
- ◇ Director- Arjun Sharma

To that effect, the sessions were extremely important learning opportunities. This report will give a summary of each day of the Foundations conference.

DAY 1: SUNDAY JUNE 5TH

This day was a travel day. There were no sessions to attend after the team of delegates arrived in Ottawa. There was a quick dinner and brief tour of the Ottawa Byward Market given by President Sana. After dinner, CASA hosted a meet & greet with board games for the arriving delegates. This was to allow delegates to socialize and interact with each other before official business began.

DAY 2: MONDAY JUNE 6TH

The day began early with breakfast at 8am. This also allowed for additional socializing, as some delegates from other schools arrived late at night. The seating at the conference consisted of mostly round tables 8 tables. It created a communal setting for delegates from different schools to interact throughout the duration of the conference.

The conference began with a traditional smudge ceremony, led by Tera Cardinal, VP External of Students' Association of Mount Royal University. We moved on to the Code of Conduct Overview. This session's importance was introducing new delegates to the culture of CASA. It is one of inclusion, respect, dignity, and integrity. It allows for an environment where

everyone is seen, heard and respected. This helped set the tone for the rest of the conference.

The first plenary took place after the Code of Conduct Presentation; think of this like a CSI Board Meeting but with separate procedural rules. The Executive Director, Mackenzy Metcalfe, started with a land acknowledgement and the Code of Conduct officers for the conference were selected.

Next on the agenda was an icebreaker, CASA Bingo. This was quick way for people to interact with each other as the conference days would be long. Once the icebreaker was complete, CASA's Executive Director, Mackenzy Metcalfe, hosted an Introduction to CASA presentation.

Director Arjun Sharma states in his report:

"Canadian Alliance of Student Associations is a federal advocacy organization for post-Secondary students in Canada. It is a non-partisan, non-profit and member-based organization. The actual work of CASA includes Policy Development & Research and Advocacy & Communication."

For more information, please request to see the presentation slides.

The day ended with a plenary to elect the Board of Directors for the upcoming year. This election was one of the most defining moments of the conference. It was a 4.5-hour meeting that saw candidates answer a barrage of questions from the member schools they would be representing. It was clear that selecting the Board of Directors was very important to the members because they would be aiding in the direction of policy and advocacy for the next year. There were elections for the following positions: Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Director of Policy, Director of Advocacy, Director of Membership, and Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (Sharma, 2022). CSI President, Sana Banu was elected as Director of Membership for the 2022-2023 year.

DAY 3: TUESDAY JUNE 7TH

After an 08:00am breakfast and some more socializing, the day began with CASA'S Strategic plan overview from 2021-2024. It outlined the five pillars that CASA has realized as strategic priorities. They are Policy & Research, Advocacy, Membership, Governance and Public Relations. There was an activity associated with the presentation, it included each table ranking the strategic priority that CASA was strong and discussing which priority needed improvement over the next year.

This was followed by a presentation from the Quebec Student Union. CASA has had a mutually beneficial partnership with QSU to advocate for post-secondary education students

on a federal level. This presentation helped us understand the educational landscape in Quebec, and the benefit of the partnership with CASA. It spurred a Q&A session on student mental health because QSU had just finished a survey with results that showed the epidemic of mental health within their student membership.

Cultural Competency Training was hosted by Danielle Gilmore just before lunch. This is one of the sessions that had immense impact on all the delegates in attendance. Danielle is a knowledgeable, charismatic, patient and experienced teacher in the aspect of EDI. A phrase that was used to impact all our psyche was: "We are the ones that we have been waiting for". That can be interpreted in many ways, however, in regard to creating a culture of acceptance, inclusion and non-discrimination, no one is going to save us but us.

Director Fatir Raza writes:

"This session helped us look at people beyond their materialistic gains and acknowledge their diversity and uniqueness. The session helped in refreshing the concept of self-efficacy. The session also was eye-opening when it reflected on self-belief, which we as leaders need to inculcate in our students. "We are the ones we have been waiting for. ""

Self-reflection, and understanding the learning outcomes and habits passed down from our ancestors were a key part of this session. It helped us understand that each of us makes assumptions of other people without trying to truly know them.

Director Arjun Sharma states in his report:

"It brought to light the fact that no two people are same, and that we all interpret things differently based on our origins and cultures. However, this does not imply that we should make any assumptions about others. Being attentive of our words and deeds, as well as being compassionate, is the first step in creating an equitable and inclusive society. Everything begins with us."

The day ended with two sessions. One was the CASA Policy Library Overview hosted by Mackenzy Metcalfe. "It helped decode the method to read policies using specific abbreviations or alphabets. The presentation reflected on the fact that policy should be simple and easy. The presentation also emphasized the importance of amendments and how to use them based on the constant shifting needs of post-secondary education", writes Fatir Raza

The final session was “Issues that matter to your SU”, which was an interactive session that encouraged healthy debate and discussion on issues that affected our student members.

Director Kartik Pahwa writes:

“This session aimed to aid the SU’s to come up with common issues of students which can be targeted this year. This was achieved by several discussion exercises including persuasion and negotiation techniques. Overall, this exercise also helped in strengthening the bond between all SU members of CASA to work as one voice for students.”

This activity aimed to help CASA understand its members needs and make sure that advocacy efforts aligned with these needs, while getting a grasp on new issues that could become priority in the coming year.

Some of the priorities that ended up on the forefront are as follows:

1. Student Financial Aid
2. Student Mental Health
3. Student Jobs
4. Open Educational Resources
5. Student Housing
6. Student Research
7. Environmental and Climate Change

DAY 4: WEDNESDAY JUNE 8TH

After breakfast, the day started with a presentation on the Federal Political Climate. This session was hosted by the Government and Stakeholder Relations Officer, Lucas Granger. It encompassed the political climate in Canada while educating the delegates on the way the political positions work on the federal level. It was also used to showcase the importance of maintaining diplomatic relationships between CASA and Parliament Hill.

Following this was a presentation by Matt Henderson from Polytechnics Canada.

Polytechnics Canada is the voice of leading research-intensive, publicly funded polytechnics, colleges and institutes of technology. The importance of this presentation was rooted in the fact this organization is advocating for federal financial investment in:

- ◇ Support for applied research in Polytechnics across Canada.
- ◇ Post-Secondary Infrastructure
- ◇ Experiential Learning

As well, other aspects that improve the success of students across polytechnics in Canada.

Before lunch, CASA Staff outlined the various Committee Positions so that delegates in attendance could ponder on what committee to join and help make an impact on Federal advocacy priorities. Elections for these positions were held on Day 5.

The final session of the day was hosted by the NIAC Committee. It was led by Tera Leigh Cardinal, Trishtina Godoy-Contois, Shannon McGinnis Cornelsen, and Kyle Cook. The session was used to inform delegates on the work being done, progress that has been made and advice on how to build better relationships with Indigenous communities on our various campuses.

Director Fatir Raza writes:

“This panel helped understand indigenous students' beliefs and stigmas towards schools/colleges/universities. The discussion helped us know how to improve the relationship with the indigenous students on campus and make them feel heard. The panel also helped us understand how to use resources effectively for our indigenous students.”

Director Kartik Pahwa also writes:

“Furthermore, they gave possible solutions for issues like why it is difficult for native people to send their children to universities/colleges for higher studies, also, why native students in colleges/universities find it difficult to come out and stand as leaders.”

The day ended with an interactive session led by NIAC Committee's Trishtina. A short story was given to everybody, and each table was asked to discuss and rank the characters, the only rule was that each table had to reach consensus. It was deeply intriguing and 80% of tables could not come to a consensus. The lesson here was to teach everyone that “you can change people's beliefs, but you can't change their values.”

DAY 5: THURSDAY JUNE 9TH

The day began with a presentation from Brianna Workman. She is a representative from College and Institutes Canada (CiCan). Similar to Polytechnics Canada, CiCan advocates for colleges and institutes as vital role players in addressing issues like **climate change**, **innovation**, **indigenous education**, and **economic growth**. Recent advocacy efforts include: applied research, International Students, Skills and Training, Infrastructure, Sustainability and Copyright.

The next item on the agenda was the Mentorship Program presented by CASA Staff. Director Kartik Pawha writes:

“CASA has an impressive group of previous delegates/staff who can mentor the organization’s members. Due to the vast benefits of alumina’s engaging with new student leaders CASA has started this mentorship network program.”

This session showcased the value CASA has brought to members in the past, and the value past members believe it will bring to new delegates.

There was short presentation from Elections Canada. Mackenzy Metcalfe hosted the presented because the representative from Elections Canada was unable to make it. It outlined the campaign efforts of Elections Canada to increase voter turnout in the student population. One of such campaigns was the “Get Out and Vote” campaign.

As the day wrapped up, CASA’s Executive Director, Mackenzy Metcalfe and Treasurer, Kordell Walsh gave attending member schools a financial update. This included the 2022 year-end budget and the approved 2023 budget.

The conference wrapped up with a plenary that was used to elect various candidates to Committee Positions. The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations has eight committees (Colleges and Polytechnic Advisory Group (CPAG), Governance and Internal Review Committee (GIRC), Graduate Advisory Committee Group (GAG), Federal Policy Committee (FPC), National Advocacy Committee (NAC), Equity, Diversity, and Equity Committee (EDI), Member Relations Committee (MRC), and National Indigenous Advisory Committee (NIAC)), except for NIAC, with members made up of only Indigenous representatives from member schools.

BENEFITS TO CSI

Director Arjun Sharma writes:

"The networking opportunities and getting to know other delegates from various colleges and universities were the key advantages of the CASA conference. Another benefit was the ideas they had and were putting into practise in their own SU, ideas that could also be useful for our SU. We had various perspectives and thoughts, which is a crucial lesson I took away from the conference."

Director Fatir Raza writes:

"It was advantageous to learn about the importance of policies and their correlation with Maslow's pyramid, as this will help the board and our other executives make more customized policies for our student union."

Director Kartik Pawha writes:

"Apart from my own development, we were able to develop relations with many student unions and also learnt about some of the useful projects those unions are working towards bringing inclusivity on their campus and hosting in person seminars for students regarding health & wellness issues, increasing job prospects through developing market specific skills etc."

President Sana Banu writes:

"Through understanding of CASA priorities and game plan for the year 2022-23 is helpful to align our own advocacy plan. Networking and best practices from other student leaders were highlights to bring back to explore at our own SU."

Vice President Nelson Chukwuma writes:

"Understanding the importance of advocating for our student members on our federal level helps ensure that our priorities remain in line with students needs. The CASA Foundations conference provided an intro to the federal platform and will help retain our student members' trust in CSI."
