

## SassWatch Podcast Transcript - Released on November 22, 2020

**Vikita:** Hey everyone, I'm Vikita, the SRA observer and you're listening to SASSwatch, the podcast for Artscis wanting to learn more about what's happening in SRA, the MSU, and Artsci in general! To introduce myself, my pronouns are she/her, I'm in 2nd year, and I'm super excited to get things rolling in advocacy this year. This podcast should hopefully be a place where you can all catch up on what's been happening especially in this weird and wacky online year where we're not physically on campus and its a little harder to keep a track of what's happening outside our quarantined bubbles.

Welcome to the November podcast of SASSwatch. We have 4 main segments of this podcast: Need to Know, Get in the Know, Get to Know, and Know More. First, I'm going to start with a bit of an intro to the SRA and MSU as I know we've probably got some new first year listeners tuning in. Then I'll be giving some updates of what's been going on in the past few SRA meetings. I'll end with something a bit more fun where you'll get to know 2 first years: Navya and Emily, who will be giving you their scoop, the ins and outs, and the tea on how online school has been for them so far!

As you know, the timestamp of each part will be listed in the transcript which can be accessed at the link in the description of the episode!

1:43

Without further do, and to keep things as speedy as possible, let's start with Need to Know: what is the SRA, the MSU, what are all these acronyms that we're all supposed to know. Okay, I'll break it down. Let's start with the MSU. So the MSU aka the McMaster Students Union is the largest group on campus representing about 24,000 undergrad students at Mac. It serves students by allowing them to have political representation as well enhancing their student life, through the operation of clubs, 25 student services, and more! As well, the union allows for student advocacy at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. How is the MSU governed? There are full-time staff and part time staff, as well as 4 elected Board of Directors. Then under the Board sits the SRA or the Student Representative Assembly and the Executive Board, and then the General Assembly (which is all of you as the student body).

And now, what is the SRA or Student Representative Assembly? THE SRA is made up of 35 students elected to represent each faculty, advocating on a university-wide level; we do things like ratify clubs, advocate for more equitable policies on campus, and voice your concerns! The number of SRA reps each faculty has is dependent on how big it is. Since Artsci is super small, we have one SRA rep, our brilliant Adeola! We are the only faculty to have a SRA Observer position, who is responsible for sitting on meetings and acting as a liaison to Artsci (and that's me!) The SRA has biweekly meetings for 3-5 hours (yep, they can get pretty long), which are open to all of you (you can view them live on the SRA Facebook at 5pm every other Sunday!)

Sorry for the ramble, but that was a sufficient crash course on the SRA! Now to what's been happening in the SRA: the Get in the Know.

3:53

Okay, I'll keep this section short. At the beginning of the year, we've been hearing about the year plans and report from each Caucus (or faculty) as well as ratifying various Bylaw 5 MSU Groups. At last meeting, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Assembly launched a student survey to collect info about quality accessibility and affordability of post-secondary schools in Ontario so you can fill out the survey and potentially win a \$100 gift card! In September, we also made a change in club operating policy and waived requirements to have at least 25 full time MSU members to function as a club due to COVID as well as waived the \$5 club membership fee. So yeah, that's the very brief version of what's been happening, but if you would like more info, you can read the SRA meeting minutes on the MSU website. Orrr, you can follow us on Twitter at SRAArtsci to be updated on what's happening in real time at SRA meetings.

4:59

Now we're going to the Get to Know segment, where you'll get to know 2 amazing ArtScis and future podcasters (seriously they sound so eloquent): Navya and Emily where we discuss all things online school and accessibility.

So I wanted to first start off with asking you how you're doing? How has the transition to Zoom university been for you? We can first start with Navya:

**Navya:** I think there's typically two parts to the transition to University that people really talk about and the first is the jump in workload and I know we've been told that you know the jump from high school to University is a huge jump in terms of workload and I think we were all prepared for that but it's definitely been exacerbated by being on line particularly because in our asynchronous classes we're being forced to teach ourselves a lot of the content and the profs don't really have as much time to go over things with us in person or as they would in person. I think the second aspect what's important is the social aspect and it's been really difficult in a lot of cases you would be able to meet people through school, classes or extracurriculars and that's just not happening organically anymore and you really have to put in effort outside of your already overwhelming workload to meet new people and talk to them and to do all of that through screen when I've already spent all my days on the screen, it can be really overwhelming sometimes and there are days where I just wanna throw my phone out the window so yeah I mean we're all coping the best that we can, but it's not ideal for sure.

Navya: Hmm, yeah I totally relate Navya. It's been so hard to enjoy socialization when it occurs in the place and on the device where school happens. What are your thoughts Emily?

**Emily:** I have found the transition to online University to be not as bad as I was expecting. It's been pretty easy to adjust to taking online classes as opposed to in person. I believe this is mainly because I switched to online high school in March just after the March break like most high school students. This meant that I already had some experience with online classes that I could then apply Zoom University and adapting to online learning in this slightly different context. Sure I have professors now instead of teachers but it feels like it's still March and I'm still in high-school after constantly remind myself that I'm actually a University student now so if anything I found the transition from virtual high school to virtual University to be not as difficult as I might have hoped for. Going to University is supposed to be such an important milestone in substantial to welcome change in a student's life. This transition also typically revolves around the idea of physical movement moving out of your hometown and an interior dorm room for example, it feels like I'm missing out on an integral part of my education and University experience which I guess I kind of miss and it's been hard to come to terms with this effect. So overall I'd say that the transition to Zoom University has been fairly easy and uncomplicated in terms of online learning but that is precisely where my issue lies, since it is not as difficult as I feel like it should have been or was supposed to be.

**Vikita:** What barriers have you faced due to online school?

**Navya:** I personally have been quite lucky not to have faced any technological barriers or anything like that when it comes to dealing with online school but I know that there are. I have classmates who are struggling with tech problems with poor Internet or even with time zone differences which can be overwhelming even if you're just you know an hour or two off to have to travel deadlines and when things are doing a completely different time zones. The biggest thing for me has definitely been screen fatigue and I really do feel that an I think I used to cope with it when the weather was still good by taking walks and try to print as many things as I could but now that it's colder the walk option isn't as easily available and I'm starting to go a little stir crazy sitting by computer day after day after day and I think that's the biggest struggle for me at least.

**Vikita:** Thanks for sharing that Navya. Emily, have you seen any benefits come out of this at all?

**Emily:** In terms of real academic benefits to online learning, there certainly are some important ones worth discussing. Learning at your own pace is definitely a big one. With asynchronous lectures you can pause rewind or re-watch them as you see fit so you are able to really learn at your own pace and go over a concept that you maybe didn't fully grasp the first time you watched the video. Similarly most synchronous lectures are also recorded so it's not a big deal if you miss a class and you need to re-watch it later or if you didn't take notes or if you answer incomplete you can always refer back to that recorded lecture. I suspect there's also a much higher ratio of open book to closed book tests this year which I would consider a big advantage since I personally do find open book tests to be easier. Another benefit is the organization aspect. Everything I need is right beside me at my desk so I don't need to worry

about carrying stuff around campus and deciding what I need to bring to class and ultimately forgetting something important which I admittedly did a lot of during high school. The stress of figuring out where exactly I'm supposed to be on campus and learning how to navigate this new environment has also been removed, though I will say the abundance of virtual platforms does do a pretty good job recreating this stress but probably not to the same extent. So in general I'd say that convenience is the most prevalent benefit of online learning.

**Vikita:** Do you feel like the quality of education is what you expected? Or could there be improvements, Emily?

**Emily:** This is a difficult question to answer because it's really hard to criticize my professors who for the most part seem to be doing as much as they possibly can to make the most out of this obviously not ideal situation. In terms of the quality of the teaching I'd say it's mostly on par with what I expected. It is of course not ideal to be online and in my opinion online teaching will never measure up to in-person teaching. One thing that I have found especially frustrating has been last minute changes to test policies. I think it's crucial for professors to maintain as much consistency and stability as they can this year given our current situation.

**Vikita:** I'm also curious to know, is there anything that could make online learning more accessible for first years?

**Navya:** The issues with accessibility that I think quite a few students may be struggling with is that a lot of our courses have made the choice to spread themselves out over several online platforms. I have some courses where you know I log into 5, 6 even 7 different sites for the same course and there's different deadlines on each site and so it's a little bit difficult trying to keep track of when everything is due and where it's due and it's very easy to miss parts of a course. I think the other area where there's maybe room for improvement as well is in terms of extra help and resources that are available to students. I've only ever tried to use the math help centre once for example and it was a little confusing to navigate in its new format on teams and I think that's something that makes extra help a little bit less accessible for first years because we don't really know how any of that any of those support systems work right now. We're brand new to University and we haven't had any experience using them so to have to use them for the first time online can be a little bit overwhelming. I think maybe a list of resources and how to access them I want to ask for. I think all of those types of resources are things that might seem basic but we're really struggling with them; that would definitely help first years as well.

**Vikita:** For sure, those are all such valid and important concerns, and hopefully we can work to address them over the year. To wrap this up, I wanted to ask if you both had any last thoughts?

**Navya:** The university has definitely tried very hard to make online university less stressful and difficult for first years. I would say that the one thing that you know perhaps the university and

first years all have to sort of keep in mind is we have to be patient. Nobody really knows what we're doing especially not since first years and a little bit of patience and understanding would really go along way and making us feel more comfortable in our situation. We don't always know what we're doing, we wouldn't have known even if we were in person and it's harder still online, but yeah just patience and understanding.

Vikita: Wow, that was such an insightful conversation with some of our first years. It's really interesting to understand how online learning has been, especially for a group who hasn't really experienced in-person uni before.

15:15

Finally, I'll end this episode with our Know More segment, I'll give you 3 final points to leave you hopefully wanting to Know More:

1. Adeola and I have made an Accessibility Guidebook to help us all navigate accessibility through online learning which you can access with the link in your emails from me. Feel free to fill out the feedback form at any time and we will make changes to the guidebook to suite you!
2. We have an SRA Milk and Cookies coming up where we discuss our SRA year plan and goals for the year, hear from you guys about what you want to see in terms of Artsci and Mac-wide advocacy, as well as gain interest in forming an SRA subcommittee where you all can help us. There will be some fun SRA trivia for prizes, so please come out on December 4th!
3. A reminder to follow us Twitter at SRAArtsci for updates!!

And thats all folks! Thanks so much for tuning in and keep your eyes open for the next episode which will be coming out next month!