Conference for struggling students returns to campus

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Last Saturday morning may have been a turning point for nearly 100 struggling University of Alberta students as they attempted to get back on track through a one-of-a-kind conference.

The second edition of Take Back the Term, an annual conference geared toward helping students cope with university life, featured sessions on the basics of learning and study skills, time management and mental health.

In speaking to the audience, Norma Rodenberg, a Student Affairs Officer with the Dean of Students Office, who organized the conference, said being a student is essentially a full-time job and usually requires external support system.

"That can come from a lot of different places," she said, mentioning friends, fellow residents, family and the resources available to them at the university itself.

"We have student services that can help support you. There are sessional instructors, TAs (teacher assistants), lab instructors — there's a whole group of people," she said.

"So think about who those people are who are really encouraging you to do better, who are telling you to sit down and study if you need to and encouraging those positive behaviours."

A popular conference session was on the basics of learning and study skills, time management and mental health.

"You have to be relatively intelligent to make it here. You're all smart, but that's not what's going to grade you."

She explained to the audience, mostly comprised of first-year students, that the amount of studying needed outside of the classroom is significantly higher than high school, given the large amounts of information they're required to learn.

"Gerner added positively reading books and memorizing facts isn't enough for academic success. In contrast, she stated that actively engaging with course material and making connections is the key to understand concepts. This means trying to make sense of it all and trying to apply it, given that students are normally tested at this level.

"You need to understand, not memorize," she said. "You can spend a lot of time studying and fail a course. You could spend very little time and actually do well. Elaboration and organization take less time than memorization, and yet are far more effective."

A university program was also previewed at the conference. Called Success on Alternative Routes, also known as SOAR, it will provide specialized support to students that risk dropping out of the U of A.

Frank Robinson said SOAR will be a program that will counsel students on the options and resources available to them to complete their degree despite the challenges that they may face.

"If you have to take a reduced course load or if you have to withdraw and sit out for a year, you can still get a degree," he said, adding that although it may take longer for them to graduate, help is available to make sure that it actually happens.

"It's recognizing that here are bumps in the road for students: some of their own choosing, and some just because life gets in the way."

SOAR will be launched later this fall and led by the Student Success Centre. Faculties and professors will be encouraged to refer any struggling students they see to the program.

Student association drops condom sponsors

Joel Ashok
THE CONCORDIAN, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

MONTREAL (CUP) — The administration at Vanier College, an English-language CEGEP in Montreal, rejected its student association’s wish for Playboy Condoms to sponsor their upcoming winter festival, thus depriving them of their sole sponsor for the event and ending a contentious dispute.

In an article published Oct. 16, The Concordian revealed the Vanier College Student Association (VCSA) established a verbal deal with Play- boy Condoms, a condom company that shares branding with Playboy Enterprises and is associated with their trademark bunny logo, to sponsor their end-of-semester gala.

In exchange for space on campus to promote their products and ads on campus, the company promised a financial and material contribution to help the student association organize the event.

According to Monique Magan, director of student services at Vanier College, a previously-planned management executive committee meeting held last week led to the unanimous agreement on the ineligibility of the VCSA’s chosen sponsor.

Following the meeting, the committee contacted the VCSA to demand the student executives cancel any possible deal with Playboy Condoms.

"Although the VCSA has a certain margin of autonomy, they need the school’s permission to have external business companies on campus," Magan said.

"We collectively agreed that the school could not have a company’s branding on campus, one related to pornography and exploitation of women for 60 years — whether the company is directly related to Playboy Enterprises or not.

"VCSA president Alexander Libe- rato said that in the face of the "controversy," the VCSA council will be addressing the issue during a regular meeting to decide whether they wanted to continue with the event on campus and follow the school’s directives to end the sponsorship, to negotiate with the administration, or to take the winter festival to a different location to keep the sponsor.

According to Liberman, Vanier’s stu- dents’ services office approved the sponsorship when they were first noti- fied in September but then decided to veto it through their committee follow- ing rising tensions.

However, Magan told The Con- cordian she never approved of the sponsorship. Magan argued that the VCSA’s liberty to initiate the deal without the school administration’s permission was based on "miscom- munication and insensitivity."

She also said misunderstandings of a similar nature are rare at the college. According to Magan, the VCSA and administration are usually in constant communication with one another.

"The idea is also to use this expe- rience to educate student executives about the company they chose and the values it promotes," she added.

Anthony Kantara of the Vanier Mob Squad, the group behind a petition launched last summer against the sponsorship, said he was pleased by the school’s decision to disallow the bunny logo on cam- pus, but wished both the VCSA and the school administration kept the student body more informed about their decisions.

Playboy Condoms representatives have since been contacted by both the VCSA and the school administration, and the posting of Vanier College as one of the destinations of the "Playin' It Safe" tour was officially taken down from their website by Oct. 20.

"It is a shame we had to go to Play- boy Condoms’ website to see the can- cellation," added Kantara.