

Annual General Meeting Report  
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April 11, 2021

Hello folks,

This year has certainly been like no other for *The Eyeopener*. We faced several challenges for which there was no precedent. I would be lying if I said it wasn't difficult but in the interest of ending the year on a high note, I'll say this: it can only go up from here. While it's still not clear what next year will look like, we have a strong masthead, some better supports in place and will hopefully see a return to campus in the foreseeable future.

### **COVID-19**

While I'm sick of talking about it, I can't discuss this year without touching on COVID-19. Last summer I decided to cut print to a reduced, biweekly run, recognizing there wouldn't be enough people on campus to justify weekly print. I hoped that eventually, this would change. The pick-up was not great—probably around 10 per cent—but it was always heartwarming when someone would see us pushing our little cart around and say they were happy to see us still printing. It made things feel somewhat normal.

Unfortunately, we had to stop printing after our November 11 issue when Toronto went into another lockdown. No one has been to the office since.

Losing a year of in-person office antics and community building was hard for the team. The impacts of digital burnout were overwhelming by the end of the year. In the event it isn't possible to return to the office in some capacity in the fall, I would recommend the next editor-in-chief try to make the workweeks more structured so editors can have a set time to log out. The sense of being on-call all the time and not having clear boundaries between work, school and home was the greatest challenge this year.

It will also be up to the next EIC to decide if we return to weekly print. Between print weeks we had online weeks, where every editor was assigned a specific day to post at least two articles, on a rotating schedule. This is something we've never tried before, and while it wasn't awful, I think the system was a little confusing and inconsistent. So I would also recommend the next EIC review the digital publishing structure, perhaps adopting the same weekly schedule regardless of whether a print edition comes out. With more clarity and structure will come more consistent publishing and accountability to the schedule.

Regardless of the challenges, I'm still proud of our team for producing eleven beautiful issues and weekly digital content; reporting on the issues that mattered to Ryerson students as well as stories of resilience and community, showing students that while they were apart, they were never alone.

## HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL CASE

An issue I dealt with behind the scenes of our reporting was a former volunteer filing an application against *The Eye* to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. In brief, I told him he could no longer tribute to *The Eye* in June 2020 when tweets surfaced of him expressing beliefs that I believed were harmful to *The Eye* community, particularly queer and trans folks. He filed his application against us in December, claiming wrongful termination on the basis of creed. We filed our response in January. It is now before the tribunal and we anticipate it'll be quite a while before we get a response. Regardless, I stand by my decision and am hopeful the tribunal will rule in our favour. I recommend future editors complete managerial and conflict resolution training given we deal with most human resources issues ourselves.

## CONSTITUTION UPDATES

The constitution hasn't been updated since 2015 and hasn't evolved to meet the unique challenges newsrooms face today. With the help of the masthead and volunteers, I made several updates to the constitution. The changes were reviewed by our legal counsel. Here's a quick summary of what's been added and amended:

- A **mission statement** and **vision statement** were created to clearly outline our equity mandate to anyone who wishes to work or volunteer for *The Eye*. The mission statement affirms our role on campus. The vision statement outlines our broader commitment to anti-oppressive reporting, equity and building positive relationships with marginalized communities, including, but not limited to, Indigenous, Black, racialized, transgender, queer and disabled communities. All employees, volunteers and content will reflect and adhere to the values expressed in these statements.
- **Article 1.2: Ethics and Practices** has been amended to address and outline our position and protocols on addressing factual errors, objectivity and advocacy, fairness and accuracy, transparency and anonymous sources and tips. The section also includes a zero-tolerance policy for hate speech, discrimination and harassment in our workspace, community and publication.
- **Bylaw No. 5** was created to better define the role and responsibilities of volunteers at *The Eye*. Article 1 outlines who can volunteer for *The Eye* and confirms that volunteers are not formally employed. It also outlines the policies volunteers must adhere to. Article 2 outlines under what circumstances a volunteer may be subject to disciplinary action. The section then outlines progressive disciplinary measures. The EIC will make every effort to resolve problems that arise with volunteers, but should all other avenues be exhausted, the volunteer's relationship with *The Eye* will be terminated. There are provisions in this section that outline the procedure for termination, including a vote from the editorial board that must be passed by a two-thirds majority.
- **Bylaw No. 6** concerns the use of social media. It discusses how social media should be used generally by Eye community members then outlines specific expectations for editorial board members, then volunteers. The major difference is editors may identify themselves as employees on social media, whereas volunteers should not identify

themselves in any way that may lead people to believe they're paid employees. Further, editors are mandated to refrain from publicly taking sides on matters *The Eye* reports on, whereas volunteers are free to express these opinions; however they may not be assigned a story covering that specific topic (eg. if a volunteer publicly endorses a student union candidate then they would not be allowed to report on elections).

- **Bylaw No. 7** discusses *The Eye's* unpublishing practices. Having a public and accessible unpublishing policy allows us to be transparent with readers around how their voices will be used in stories and makes it clear that once they're on record, they're permanently on record outside of extenuating circumstances. This is part of *The Eye's* broader effort to meet students where they're at in terms of journalism literacy and ensure they're making an informed choice when speaking to an editor or writer for an article. The policy also outlines how a source can submit an unpublishing request.
- The **Human Rights Policy** asserts that harassment and discrimination will not be tolerated at *The Eye* and will be addressed in a timely and serious manner. It applies to all employees, volunteers and interns, in every aspect of the workplace environment, including online communications. This was written based on a template provided by the Ontario Human Rights Commission then tailored to the specific needs of *The Eye*.
- The **Complaint Resolutions Procedure** outlines how human rights complaints can be made and how they will be addressed. This includes an informal process, recognizing that some folks may not feel safe or comfortable making a formal report and going through all the steps of an investigation.

## SECTIONS

**News:** Alexandra Holyk, Charlize Alcaraz, Heidi Lee and Libaan Osman did an incredible job keeping the Ryerson student body informed during a year where accuracy was absolutely crucial. The team reported on COVID-19 measures on campus, updates to classroom and teaching delivery in an unpredictable year and broke several stories regarding the conduct of the Ryerson Students' Union. I greatly appreciate their commitment to holding institutions accountable and keeping students informed quickly; often dropping everything to get on a breaking story or staying up late to break down union troubles into a digestible format. Through it all, I saw these four editors support each other and check-in with each other constantly. It's been a joy to see them all grow this year.

**Arts & Culture:** Rhea Singh and Abeer Khan both set the benchmark for treating sources with the utmost respect and compassion. This year the arts and culture section published some of the most heartwarming stories, highlighting the perseverance and strength of Ryerson's best artists. Both of these editors are best known for their kindness in working with volunteers and helping them to publish their strongest work possible. They make *The Eye* a welcoming community space and I'm incredibly grateful for them both. Rhea also helped produce the arts and communities combo special issue: *Change Is Coming*, a nuanced exploration of social justice activism and its roots in Ryerson's campus.

**Business & Technology:** Aaliyah Dasoo was a powerhouse editor this year, publishing the first special issue of the year despite being a first-time editor, settling into the job quickly then challenging herself to try infographics and visual data. She made the biz and tech section accessible to readers by breaking down jargon and complicated topics into layman's terms, producing stories that were easy to digest and always left me feeling like I'd learned something new. Aaliyah also highlighted the work of BIPOC women specifically in biz and tech, which is the kind of coverage I hope to see more of going forward.

**Communities:** Kiernan Green set the standard for how we can report on broader societal and cultural issues through a Ryerson lens. The communities section covered a broad range of topics, from reporting on the Ryerson African Students' Association solidarity with Ugandan protestors to a poignant opinion piece on the authenticity and purpose of land acknowledgments at Ryerson. Through the "Through My Eyes" section, Kiernan also amplified several students' voices, helping them to publish thoughtful personal essays. Kiernan also developed the initial idea for *Change is Coming* and took an enthusiastic initiative to produce a special issue in his first term. I wish him the best of luck as he chases his journalism dreams across the country to report in Victoria, B.C.

**Sports:** Will Baldwin truly had his work cut out for him—he had to come up with a year's worth of content without ever covering a single game due to the pandemic. Through perseverance, creativity and a drive to explore the aspects of Ryerson sport culture we've never touched on, Will was able to produce interesting pieces the entire year. Despite not being a sports person myself I was always glad to learn something new from editing Will's pieces. Will is passionate about sport and wants to make it welcoming for everyone, which he accomplished through his special issue, *Why Sport Matters*. These stories highlighted sport not just as games but as spaces for people to find themselves, develop emotional connections and pursue lifelong dreams. I'm grateful to Will for challenging my narrow perception of sports and showcasing what the section can achieve.

**Features:** Dhriti Gupta puts so much care into every piece from working with the photo team to produce stunning visuals, to meticulously researching and fact-checking each piece, to doing thorough line edits with each writer, giving them a valuable learning experience. Dhriti also produced a stunning special issue called "A Love of One's Own," taking a unique approach to the Love and Sex issue by considering these topics from the perspective of folks who haven't yet had a relationship. Despite tackling 22 stories—the most we've ever packaged in one special issue—no elements fell short: the web design, words and visuals were all beautiful. Dhriti's special issue spreadsheet has also permanently changed the way we organize special issues for the better, affectionately earning her the title of "special issue Yoda."

**Fun & Satire:** Zach Roman and Rochelle Raveendran are genuinely two of the nicest and funniest people I've met, and I'm grateful that our readership had them to rely on for a good laugh during an otherwise disappointing year. Zach is a master of "punching up"—producing satire stories that take a humorous but pointed jab at people in power. He showcased his talents in *Everything Is Not Fine*, an ambitious special issue showing that things that may sound like

good news may have a darker undertone. It was the perfect balance of not making light of a frankly bleak reality, but not succumbing to the darkness either. Rochelle took over in the winter semester and has been such a superstar. In her first year of j-school she's taking on copy edits with authority, providing thoughtful feedback to novice satire and comedy writers and consistently assigning pieces touching on relevant social discourse. Given how much time she has ahead of her, I can't wait to see what she does next.

**Media:** Parnika Raj, Connor Thomas and Eli Savage had a challenging year with the loss of equipment and office space. However, they were able to get creative and still produce videos that engaged our audience on YouTube and Instagram. Parnika is an Eye veteran but still challenged herself this year by pivoting to motion graphics, creating short teasers for our most engaging stories. Connor and Eli focused on more humorous but informative videos; communicating our overall branding and tone well while also breaking up hard news with more lighthearted pieces. I appreciated the team's hard work and commitment to experimenting with new formats.

**Online:** Tyler Griffin, Madi Wong and Kayla Zhu have essentially been my go-to co-EICs for the year. I would be lost without their guidance and newsroom leadership. Being one of the last pairs of eyes on each piece that we publish, the online time ensured all our reporting was solid, our copy was clean and that there weren't any libelous offences in any of our scoops. They were key team players; picking up tasks for me when I was otherwise occupied and identifying areas for improvement in our reporting and production process. They also worked like a well-oiled machine in keeping our social media presence consistent and up-to-date, a crucial task this year given social media was our main line of communication with the community. I can't thank them enough for their hard work and dedication.

**Web:** This year we hired Farhan Sami as a contract web developer and I couldn't be happier with what he accomplished. When I decided to hire a web developer I only had a vague idea of what the role actually entailed. Farhan took the shaky vision of producing microsites for our special issues and turned it into a beautiful reality, producing five different websites built from scratch to showcase our team's work. He collaborated incredibly well with our team, translating computer science into layman's terms, identifying what was possible to code and setting feasible deadlines with managing editors. Farhan was enthusiastic to dive into the world of journalism but I'm glad that we got to see part of his world too—especially as the only member of masthead that's actually good at math. I hope we collaborate more with people from different academic backgrounds in the future.

**Photo:** Jes Mason, Jimmy Kwan, Laila Amer and Harry Clarke had a challenging year in terms of taking photos amid a pandemic. Both Jes and Jimmy especially came into the role as photographers first and foremost then had to pivot to illustration once it was no longer viable to do photoshoots. Both of them took on this challenge with enthusiasm and joined Harry in Laila in producing beautiful visuals to accompany our stories, striking covers and cohesive visual themes for special issues. The photo team worked so hard and came up with some of the most beautiful illustrations I think I've ever seen come out of *The Eye*—topping their work every week.

They also pushed for more accessible visuals, considering colour contrast in palettes and ensuring the team uploaded alt-text with all our photos. Given all four of them were relatively new editors I couldn't be more impressed with their ability to adapt and grow.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

Once things are approaching normal, there are a few things I hope *The Eye* can bring back: equity training, which I still feel was a hallmark event of last year; more training events as well as fun community events once it's safe; and more experimenting with what we can accomplish when we have a web developer. Finally, I am manifesting at least one Ram in the Rye dinner for volume 55. I can't believe I'm saying this but I've been dreaming of drinking a Billy all year.

But while I want things to change, I also hope the strengthened sense of community continues into next year. At the beginning of the year I told the team that there's no "I" in *Eyeopener*, there's only "The Eye," meaning they had to care about every other section as much as their own. Our masthead took this corny joke and ran with it. Despite being socially distanced, our *Eyeopener* community felt closer than ever. At our final masthead meeting, most editors identified the team environment as being the highlight of an otherwise difficult year; recognizing *The Eye* gave them a sense of safety and stability. We also enjoyed camaraderie with our volunteers who showed just as much passion and enthusiasm for their work as ever despite engaging exclusively online.

While it's hard to make predictions about the next year, I have absolutely no doubt that the incoming masthead and our wonderful volunteers will continue to produce incredible reporting, push for a better and safer campus for all and create a safe space for students from all walks of life to find their voice. I wish them all the best.

Be safe and well,

Catherine Abes

### **Motion: Amending the constitution**

1. Whereas the current constitution has not evolved to reflect the unique challenges our newsroom may face, such as social media conduct, unpublishing requests, etc.
2. Whereas a clear mission and vision statement will help enshrine our equity mandate that's become a critical aspect of The EYEOPENER's journalism and role in the Ryerson community
3. Whereas a human rights policy and complaints procedure are necessary under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Therefore be it resolved that the Mission statement and Vision statement be adopted.

Therefore be it resolved that the Ethics and Practices section of Article 1 be amended.

Therefore be it resolved that Bylaw No. 5, a bylaw defining the role and responsibilities of volunteers at The EYEOPENER, be adopted.

Therefore be it resolved that Bylaw No. 6, a bylaw concerning use of social media, be adopted.

Therefore be it resolved that Bylaw No. 7, a bylaw concerning The EYEOPENER's unpublishing policies, be adopted.

Therefore be it resolved that the Human Rights Policy and Complaint Resolutions Procedure be adopted.

Be it further resolved that all The EYEOPENER editorial members, staff and volunteers will be required to sign a form at the beginning of each school year affirming that they have read and understood The EYEOPENER's Human Rights Policy.

Be it further resolved that the Policy will be reviewed on a biannual basis.