

Annual General Meeting Report  
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Hello everyone,

Thank you for coming to our annual general meeting. I'll start off this report by echoing the words of our previous two EICs in saying that this year has been far from what we expected going into it. The past three years have been incredibly difficult for our newspaper, as we've tried to recover from the impacts of the Student Choice Initiative and the COVID-19 pandemic on our operations. When I reflect on these times, the word that comes to mind is: resilience.

Despite these immense challenges, we've persevered to continue publishing and finding creative ways to operate, and I've been just blown away by the outstanding work and dedication of our editors, staff and volunteers to continue to bring critical news, information and even respite to the Ryerson community. I see now that the labour and hardships we've endured in recent years will ensure The Eyeopener can thrive and continue to do its crucial work for years to come—which makes all of it worth it. I can't wait to see what the future holds for this punchy, inspiring campus publication.

### **COVID-19/Hybrid Work**

There's no doubt we're all sick of hearing about it, but the impact COVID-19 continued to have on this year's masthead must be addressed. While some of us thought this would be the year we moved past the consequences of the pandemic and isolated work, that proved...a little shortsighted. This year was characterized by unknowns, as COVID cases fluctuated and our operations continually changed to best fit the circumstances. This was, perhaps, even tougher on us this year, as the constant uncertainty made it impossible to plan even a month in advance.

My largest focus this year was building upon last year's mostly-digital operations to find a hybrid work model that resulted in both top quality journalism and reduced digital burnout for our employees. In the fall, we kept print alive on a bi-weekly basis while delivering strong digital content on non-print weeks—and it was heartwarming to see so many on campus reading or asking for copies. The fall semester proved to be more consistent than the winter semester, which saw us working from home for its entirety due to a spike in COVID-19 cases of the Omicron variant and the subsequent flooding of our office.

Hybrid work and digital communication present unique challenges for a student newspaper, as our work is largely dependent on fast communication, collaboration and the ability to quickly adapt to change. As a result, the masthead had to work extremely hard in less-than-ideal conditions, and it quickly became a priority for me to ensure the mental and physical health of all editors—since I struggled deeply with this in previous year, even without a global pandemic. I tried to bring out the best work in my editors, but also tried to give them as much breathing room

as possible when work, school or the general circumstances became too much. I believe this strategy allowed everyone to produce work they were proud of and had ownership over, while also prioritizing their health and academics. The result, in my opinion, was still top-quality journalism, which is what happens when you prioritize health above labour.

Though we were still able to accomplish some incredible things this year, the circumstances of our situation means we had to compromise on certain ambitions—mainly our investigative projects and the revamping of our website. But we're trying not to be too hard on ourselves, and hopefully this can be a focus for next year's editors if better working conditions allow it.

I'm so proud of our team for producing 10 beautiful print issues and weekly digital content; reporting on the issues that mattered to Ryerson students, as well as stories of joy and community, showing students that while they were apart, they were never alone.

### **Coverage of Ryerson's renaming and the Indigenous community**

There's no doubt that our biggest reported focus this year was on Ryerson's renaming and ongoing process of "reconciliation." Across all sections, we made this an editorial priority early on in the year. Historically, we haven't always been on good terms with the Indigenous community at Ryerson given previous mistakes in our reporting on Indigenous issues. So it was beautiful to see our editors make a conscious effort to turn that around this year, and we were the only publication dedicating consistent coverage to this process beyond the big headlines. From the news team breaking the renaming story to the communities section's coverage of the renaming committee, to Miranda Black's opinion writing and student input on the name change—we've seen largely positive reactions to this coverage and effort, both from Indigenous and settler community members.

As Ryerson is set to announce its new name to go into effect next school year, I'd encourage the next editor-in-chief to keep this editorial focus even if the conversation on Egerton Ryerson and the residential school system dies down. Indigenous Peoples and communities have been misrepresented by media for far too long, and campus papers are in a unique position to help set us on a course correction by telling Indigenous stories—both positive and of their hardships—at all times, in all sections, even when they're not trending news topics.

### **2022 RSU Election**

Covering a students' union that did not want to be contacted was another highlight of this year, as it taught our editors how to get creative when reporting on sources who evade accountability. Our news team did unparalleled work this year covering a faulty election process, highlighting the failures of this year's executive team and making sure students knew what was being done with their money.

While this made for good reporting with clear impact (more on that below), I would recommend next year's editor-in-chief and news editors connect with the incoming Ryerson Students' Union

executives early on to establish clear guidelines for communication and regular interviews. This should be something all parties can agree on as in the best interests of students.

## **SECTIONS**

**News:** Heidi Lee, Thea Gribilas, Edward Djan and Sarah Tomlinson produced some of the best student news reporting in the country this year, evidenced by their win of a national news reporting JHM award. They worked tirelessly to uplift the Indigenous community at Ryerson, stayed on top of the fall of the Egerton statue in the summer and broke the largest student news story in Canada by being the first to report Ryerson's decision to rename. They provided crucial public service journalism by documenting students' return to campus, changing public health protocols and constant campus closings and re-openings. Their reporting on the Ryerson Students' Union elections had far-reaching impact, acting as one of the few sources of information for students in a year when executives refused to answer emails or respond to interview requests. I have no doubt that their work contributed to the first independent RSU president being elected in recent memory. These four are some of the most talented and dedicated reporters I know and I can't wait to follow what will surely be long and illustrious careers that began here at The Eyeopener.

**Arts & Culture:** Elizabeth Sargeant's work as arts and culture editor provided much needed human interest stories to take students' minds off all the doom and gloom. She highlighted artists from communities that have traditionally not been featured by arts writing in Canada and told impactful stories through the lens of social change. She managed to capture the inspiring and creative community at Ryerson at a time when they've been more disconnected than ever, providing an alternative editorial voice that made our newspaper fun and punchy. Her special digital issue, The Body Issue, brought attention and acceptance to our strange bodily functions in a way no other media has done before (except maybe David Cronenberg films). Elizabeth worked tirelessly every day to improve herself as an editor, journalist, writer and member of her community and it's been nothing short of beautiful to watch her immense development in such a short period of time.

**Business & Technology:** No one can bring a business or tech angle to the news like Charlize Alcaraz can. As early as last summer, Charlize provided alternative angles to news happening on campus, which has never been more important in a year of working and learning using mostly digital platforms. She expanded the biz & tech section's focus with stories on student entrepreneurs, tech innovations, the intersections of green technology, gaming, cryptocurrency, women in business and more. More recently, Charlie brought previously-taboo conversations about students' personal finance into the open and featured unique multimedia elements. November's Unplugged Issue perfectly encapsulated the highs and lows of the digital lives we've been living these past few years. Charlize somehow solidified the business founders and techies as the cool kids on campus, and I look forward to seeing where her passion for these subjects takes her.

**Communities:** Serena Lopez and Mariam Nouser developed working relationships with individuals and communities The Eyeopener has historically failed to accurately represent, and placed their voices in context of broader inequalities and systemic failure, such as that of Miranda Black's experience on the renaming committee. But they also told inspiring, positive and joyful stories, to ensure we remember that do-gooders are all around us and inspire us to do the same. Mariam and Serena sought to always lend their editorial powers to those who needed them more than we do, and all journalists could learn from how they employed empathy as an effective and necessary journalistic tool.

**Sports:** Gavin Axelrod was given the enormous task this year of covering the return of athletics after two years away, alongside game recaps and constant gym closures. Despite this workload made for two, Gavin still managed to go above and beyond, capturing eventful seasons for varsity teams, notable player profiles, breaking news related to COVID and even areas of athletics we had never touched on before. He covered social movements in sports and strived to tell stories that went beyond the scoreboard and into the identities behind student athletes' masks and jerseys—such as OUA athletes not being granted 'elite' status and the push to remove the name 'Ryerson' from varsity branding. All this work culminated in our recent Year in Sports issue and coverage of the women's basketball and men's hockey teams at nationals. His daily dedication re-built an engaged sports readership and pool of contributors that were hungry to get back to competition, and the sports community is back stronger than ever thanks to his efforts.

**Features:** Abeer Khan strived to produce features that not only supplemented our news coverage but also provided new ways to look at it, facilitating the creation of stories that students could not just empathize with but see themselves in. From sexual harassment on campus to vaccine hesitancy to international student issues, she worked to the bone to seek out fresh, nuanced topics to dive into and supported writers through the grueling feature writing process. This year's Love & Sex issue, dubbed Love, Sex & Fandom, was unlike any previous L&S issue I had seen before; a one-of-a-kind project that opened our eyes to the complex ecosystems that exist within fandom and fanfiction, solidifying them as legitimate vehicles for romance and sexuality. Outside of her editorial work, Abeer has shown immense leadership this year, and was always looking to be a helping and encouraging hand that improved her own work as well as that of everyone around her.

**Fun & Satire:** There's not much that can be said about Rochelle Raveendran's work this year in the fun & satire section that hasn't already been said, but I'll reiterate once more that Rochelle is the funniest person I know. Her masterful satire always punched up, and managed to capture the sheer absurdity of the times we're living in. From the Ryerson Students' Union to campus conservatives, to the Ryerson administration and the pseudo-professionalism of the corporate world—no one was safe from the wrath of Rochelle's pen. Her special Human Nature issue was a beautiful and lighthearted reminder of the importance of treating the natural world with respect, and she's worked incredibly hard to train contributors in the craft of satire writing. I've heard from students across the country who have lauded the section's work this year, and

Rochelle serves as a constant reminder that satire is often the most effective journalistic criticism we have to offer.

**Media:** Sonia Khurana and Norah Kim revitalized the media section this year through accessible videos and multimedia that brought important information and analysis directly to our social feeds. After being away from campus for so long, it was incredible to see and hear students in our media section once again give their thoughts on issues and be engaged members of our community. From videos diving into campus reopenings to the renaming, Sonia and Norah made a case for multimedia journalism as a core part of the work we do while teaching contributors in video editing and production. Both Sonia and Norah always looked for ways to support the editorial work of section editors and bring it to new audiences, and we can be sure that we our audiences expanded because of them.

**Photo:** Jes Mason, Laila Amer and Vanessa Kauk's visual work was the backbone of our publication this year. From Jes' efforts to keep The Eye's photojournalism alive—shooting rallies, anti-vax protests, the statue toppling and countless shoots—to Laila and Vanessa's beautiful, professional-quality graphic and illustrations, these three made a case for the importance of visual journalism in conditions meant to restrict it. Their print and digital covers always managed to capture the essence and complex feelings surround campus events in singular images, and their work on all of our special issues this year are the only reason we were able to deliver them in such spectacular fashion. The photo team also built up a dedicated base of photo contributors who managed to make visuals on par with their own. They also established accessibility as a core part of the photo section, which continues to be a standard across all sections. Without Jes, Laila and Vanessa, none of our journalism would have had the reach or impact that was necessary to facilitate meaningful change.

**Online:** Alexandra Holyk, Abby Hughes and Dhriti Gupta gave me peace of mind throughout this turbulent year, knowing they would be the last lines of defence on news stories and that they would be there to catch whatever I missed. Their leadership brought our work to an unbelievable amount of new readers, as they prioritized non-traditional social platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to reach students who may not be reading our news stories, but deserve to have news reach them regardless. They created accessible graphics and worked with all sections of the paper to grow our brand and voice, while upkeeping The Eye's reputation as an outlet that's fun and punchy, but produces amazing journalism. I cannot thank them enough for being my go-to consulting team and providing me with fresh perspectives that helped me make tough decisions. Their work, which doesn't often get the spotlight that other sections do, is the main reason this paper ran smoothly all year and I'm grateful to them for running our digital operations with confidence and grace.

**Web:** Doug Nguyen and Farhan Sami solidified their web developer positions as essential to a modern student publication, working with us to create amazing microsities and elevate our digital delivery of special issues. They produced five unique microsities this year, raising the standard for digital student journalism and design. Their perspectives as outsiders to journalism proved invaluable, showing us the potential non-traditional forms of media can have. Both Doug and

Farhan quickly became essential members of our team and worked incredibly well with all editors, picking up slack for our lack of coding and tech knowledge. I know that these now-permanent web developer positions will help The Eyeopener keep up with the constantly evolving standards of 21st century journalism and I can leave knowing Farhan and Doug forever changed the course of this publication.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

Volume 56 and its editor-in-chief have a daunting but exciting task ahead of them: figuring out how The Eyeopener will operate in a brave new post-pandemic world. COVID-19 has changed everything, and if next year proves to be the first fully in-person academic year since 2018-19, The Eyeopener must continue to innovate itself and adapt to the changing environment on campus and in the broader media landscape.

One major responsibility to tackle will be the return to weekly print, or if weekly print will return at all or in some other capacity. Further, I recommend organizing a new, streamlined process for producing microsites, as delivering special issues through separate processes for print and digital proved to be quite strenuous this year.

Another priority should be the hiring of a web developer dedicated solely to revamping our main website, [theyeopener.com](http://theyeopener.com), which has not been updated since at least 2016. We had originally given this task to our web developers, but most of their paid working hours during the semester were dedicated to developing microsites. It's become clear that this task is too large to accomplish alongside the microsites, and there should be one web developer or designer dedicated solely to the main website. It might be preferable to aim for completion of this task by the fall 2022 semester, so that website changes and updates don't interfere with our production schedule during the school year.

I would also recommend the next editor-in-chief consider adding back editorial positions that were lost when the Student Choice Initiative was implemented in fall 2020. While we were able put a second sports editor position back up for election this semester—which will be crucial if athletics return at 100% capacity next year—I believe our coverage and reach would greatly benefit from adding back a second media editor and a podcast producer so we can bring our podcast, *The Ear-opener*, back to life.

Lastly, I encourage next year's editor-in-chief and masthead to take full advantage of our office and resources to build back our community that has been somewhat fractured in recent years. Find new ways to engage Ryerson students and the broader community through events like equity training, Eyelumni talks, giveaways and collaborations with other student groups on campus. I have no doubt that we are at our best, both professionally and personally, when we can all be in the same room to connect, support and build off each other's work—and break the rules, together.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

I will refrain from making any predictions about what next year will look like, as that hasn't gone great the past few AGMs. But I will leave you with this:

My 5+ years at The Eyeopener have shaped me into the person I am today, and I am forever changed because of this place. There are few workplaces that empower young people and give them the autonomy to facilitate the changes they want to see around them. I know volume 56 will not take this, or what we've endured in recent years to ensure the paper's survival, for granted. I wish them all the best and I can't wait to read along next year with a smile.

Sincerely,

Tyler Griffin