Strengthening the Arctic Student Voice: UW’s UArctic Student Ambassador speaks out at inaugural UArctic Congress & Student Forum in St. Petersburg, Russia

There is growing unrest within the geopolitical and geographic realms of the Arctic Circle. As world powers scramble to ensure their slice of the Arctic pie, the spotlight on highly decorated political leaders and large imposing institutions invariably drowns out the voice of an oft-overlooked but significant group, that of the students.

The student voice needs empowerment, and one student leveraged his unique position to make it heard. This September, UW’s inaugural UArctic Student Ambassador Ian R. Lee, attended the first-ever UArctic Congress and Student Forum in the Russian city of St. Petersburg where he had the opportunity to talk and share his visions for the Arctic with world leaders and Arctic experts.

A recent graduate of the Geophysics program in the Department of Earth & Space Sciences, Ian is currently working on his MS in Glaciology at Dartmouth College, studying ice rheology. Ian was appointed UW’s inaugural UArctic Student Ambassador in 2014 and following a successful meeting at the Arctic Frontiers Conference in Tromsø, Norway in early 2015, this year Ian once again convened with his fellow cohort of UArctic Student Ambassadors in St. Petersburg.

Details of Ian’s meeting at Tromsø can be found here: https://jsis.washington.edu/canada/undergraduate/news.shtml#ianlee

In addition to meeting familiar faces from back in Tromsø, Ian and his fellow UArctic Student Ambassadors also welcomed the second batch of Student Ambassadors, who were appointed earlier this year and hailed from diverse backgrounds such as engineering, geography and Arctic & northern studies. This meeting granted the seniors an opportunity to mentor their juniors on what being a UArctic Student Ambassador entailed.

The UArctic Student Ambassadors, together with several other students with keen interests in the Arctic’s future, constituted the UArctic Student Forum. Activities during the one-week conference included cultural excursions to historical gems such as the Hermitage and the Arctic & Antarctic Museum, attendance at various talks given by experts in all aspects of the Arctic at St. Petersburg University, and personal discussion sessions with Arctic luminaries.

However, the one single event by far which had the greatest impact on empowering the Arctic Student Voice was the drafting and presentation of the UArctic Student Declaration. While Ian and his colleagues were part of the inaugural group of UArctic Student Ambassadors in 2014, there was no readily-available clear and highly-specific goal to help guide their work. The initial struggles led to the conception of the UArctic Student Declaration. Being given an opportunity to personally present this Declaration to and speak with rectors from institutions all over the world as well as key Arctic leadership, Ian and his colleagues wasted no time in drafting the Declaration, laying out their specific individual and collective goals as well as the required resources & support they needed to make these goals a reality.

The Student Declaration can be accessed here: http://www.uarctic.org/about-uarctic/events/uarctic-congress-2016/declaration/student-forum-declaration/

For Ian, points 5: “Efforts aimed at spreading knowledge about Arctic issues, and promoting this among the general public using traditional and modern media need to be strengthened and further supported.” & 8: “To address the views presented here, we welcome the development of programs of academic mobility through exchanges which are sponsored, supported, and promoted by UArctic, governments, universities and industry. We believe that further development in more balanced exchanges to create equal opportunities of knowledge access and competencies. We have identified a paucity of such mobility exchanges particularly for clinical polar medicine.” of the Declaration especially resonated with him, as from experience while his background
in Glaciology and Geophysics allowed flexibility in working with scientists from myriad fields such as physics, math, engineering, atmospheric sciences and geology, it was imperative to note that these were all within the domain of the physical and natural sciences, to the exclusion of the social sciences. Working as a UArctic Student Ambassador to promote a holistic Arctic education also proved challenging for Ian, as he was better able to connect and help students who were mostly within the physical and natural sciences but felt that he had a minimal impact on those outside his field due to his limited knowledge on other fields. Ian’s focus was therefore stressing the importance of a support pool for UArctic Student Ambassadors within their institutions and regions (in Ian’s case, North America), who could assist the Student Ambassador with his/her job of promoting & improving awareness of Arctic Issues and at the same time utilize their various specialized backgrounds to reach out to a greater population of diverse students, all of who had an interest in the Arctic in their own unique way.

Presenting the UArctic Student Declaration at the Rector’s Forum proved to be a great success, as in email exchanges with UArctic leadership following the presentation, the Rectors and leadership were highly impressed and the UArctic Student Declaration was made public the following day in conjunction with the UArctic Congress 2016 Declaration. The takeaway was that for anything in which you would like to be influential – always be specific and bring implementable suggestions to the table.

*The UArctic Congress 2016 Declaration can be accessed here:*

Of course, the Declaration simply laid out the framework and subsequent action had to be taken. UArctic leadership have been actively communicating with the UArctic Student Ambassadors since their return to their respective institutions on crystallizing their individual goals and developing a support system to help them achieve those goals. Having just completed his first quarter at Dartmouth College, Ian is now working with Dartmouth’s Director of Arctic Studies Virginia Ross to continue his work as a UArctic Student Ambassador for both Dartmouth, UW and North America.

There are slated to be exciting changes in the UArctic Student Program and as UW/Dartmouth’s UArctic Student Ambassador, Ian welcomes contact from interested students at UW. Updates will be posted on the UArctic Student Ambassadors’ website ([http://education.uarctic.org/studies/students/student-ambassadors/](http://education.uarctic.org/studies/students/student-ambassadors/)) as well as from personal communication between UW (Earth & Space Sciences, Quarternary Research Center and Jackson School of International Studies) and Ian so stay tuned! We wish Ian all the best at Dartmouth!

*Contact Ian at ian.lee@uarctic.org*

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