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MANIFESTO

STUDENT COMMUNITY OFFICER

UL STUDENT LIFE
ELECTIONS

2024

Community First, Always.



WHO AM I?

My name is Dervla Ryan and this year I am running for the position of Student Community Officer at Student Life. I would like to introduce myself and give everyone the chance to get to know me, as well as summarize my main goals should I be elected. While my objectives are the most important part of my manifesto, I do believe it's important to get to know candidates and understand their character before electing them to represent your national governing body.

I was born and raised in Kilkenny, and I moved to Limerick six years ago to study at UL, where I am now a final-year student (BA in European Studies). Growing up in a small town, I was often encouraged to be independent of others and reach for the stars so I could survive in the "big bad world". European Studies would allow me to travel the world and understand people on a deeper level. So, that's exactly what I did. While I found my home in UL and within Clubs & Societies, I neglected my wider community and only realised the importance of it over the past two years. So, I have dedicated the past 9 months to reaching out to all the different communities in UL and finding out what students actually need - and finally, I intend to provide solutions to these issues!



RESEARCH



I want to have a solution-focused term as community officer. This research has been paramount to my campaign as I want to focus on projects that students have asked for. Sometimes we think that we know what students want, but we must listen first! So, here's what they had to say:

1. **Mature Students:** Students expressed that they don't feel like they belong in UL. They also reported feelings of loneliness, fatigue (particularly due to exams and excessive emails), and a lack of recognition that their needs are different to other students.
2. **International Students:** Full-time and Erasmus/Study-Abroad students are looking for continuous events and shared spaces, rather than once-off opportunities. It is also quite difficult to make friends with full-time residents of Ireland.
3. **Postgraduate Students:** PhD students want to feel more included in typical student life. The workload of postgrads can be heavier than that of undergrads, and there is a hyperproductive culture that comes with it as students are shunned for not working constantly. Finally, there isn't enough dedicated space to rest and socialise.

And much much more...





OBJECTIVES

Following this 9-month research project, I was able to come up with some ideas to cater to students needs.

If elected I would aim to:

1. **Create a “Third Space” for students** - Loneliness is one of the largest problems in Ireland, let alone UL. In sociology, the “first space” is your home, the “second space” is your work/study, and the “third space” is a communal area that fosters belonging and community. There is simply not enough space for over 19,000 students to do this in UL. I am to dedicate my time and use my voice to finding or creating this space.
2. **The “Disorientation Guide”** - Orientation week is dedicated to getting students settled on campus and in academia. The “Disorientation Guide” will help students find community in by showcasing opportunities, events, groups and resources UL and Limerick.
3. **Advocate for Accessibility** - Clubs & Societies are very important as they help foster a sense of belonging and community. I am to help C&S make events and sport more accessible/diverse through tailored workshops. I also plan to keep running the Sensory Hour which was an initiative by the current Community Officer, Katie Martin.



IMPACT



During my research, I spoke to mature students, postgraduates, access students and international students. I think these objectives will have a positive impact for UL students because...

1. One of the major issues identified by all groups was a lack of space. UL campus is no longer fit for purpose and we need to create this space for students. This will result in students naturally finding community and purpose. This would also take pressure off of UL Counselling and SISC in the long run as loneliness has become an epidemic.
2. After decades of marketisation, students are told they are customers who are paying for a closed, rigorous few years of 'academic excellence'. The aim of the disorientation guide is to open up the experience of being a student at UL. It opens up possibilities to make the university experience different to what university culture expects of you: the burnout ('academic rigour') and the normalised precarity of existing in an unaffordable city. It is a guide to community and understanding.
3. All students deserve access to the same communities. Educating our community with workshops will help expand the community. This could be something as simple as arranging events/meetings in accessible areas, and training clubs on how to include people of all abilities in their activities. Students belong in UL, they should feel that way too.





OTHER IDEAS

- **Community Team** - similar to the Welfare Team, but more community focused.
- **Open Door Policy** - Schedule a time each week for students to approach me with their community needs. At another time during the week, I will meet with specific communities to discuss their needs in depth.
- Making **sport** in UL more **inclusive and accessible**.
- Creating more **community spaces** for group gatherings and more places to eat – this is to tackle the cost of living and aid those with eating disorders (in collaboration with the Welfare Officer)
- **Food banks/Clothes Banks/Shoebox Appeal during Xmas.**
- Long term: Simialr to European Universities, ensuring that two rooms in each student accommodation apartment is designated to an Erasmus student.
- Long term: Helping lecturers make their course outline, assignment instructions, and learning materials more **accessible**.
- Long term: Take action to assure there are **no assignments due or assessments scheduled during Reading Week**. This would be in collaboration with the Welfare Officer and Academic Officer.

Why?

Students need rest & recovery (Burnout);
More free time to engage in the community;
Being a student is a full-time job, we need to start accommodating for that!

Alternative: Add a Reading Week in Semester 1



EXPERIENCE

- Welfare Team Member (2023/24).
- Student Council Member: Modern Languages & Applied Linguistics Rep (2023/24) .
- UL Global Buddy Programme 2022/23.
- UL Archery Club: First-Year Rep (2018/19), Secretary (2019-2021), President (2022/23 - when we won club of the year!) and Treasurer (2023/24).
- Irish Student Archery Association: Secretary (2022/23) and President (2023/24).
- Out in UL Member (2020/2021) and UL Feminist Society Member (2023/24) .
- Irish Times 'Diversity & Inclusion' Training (2023)

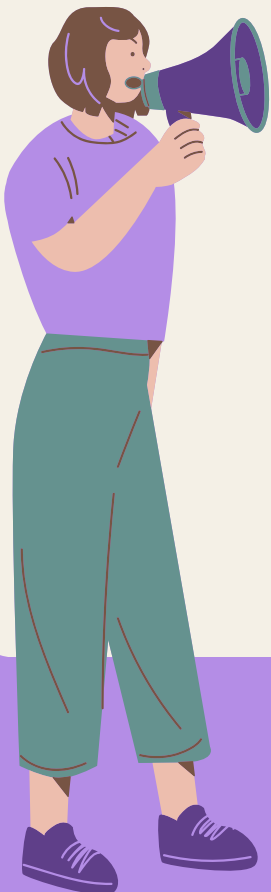
Skills & Qualities acquired as a result:

- Team Leadership
- Event Management (Local, National and International)
- Chairing meetings and effective delegation
- Intercultural competence
- Conflict Resolution
- Adaptability
- Other: Awareness of current events and challenges in UL due to attending Student Council and C&S Council.



WHY I WANT THIS ROLE

- I have loved my time here at UL. University can be difficult for everyone, but finding my community at UL was the main thing that kept me in college. I have dedicated the past 6 years to Clubs & Societies and they have given me so much. Now I want to give back to them and the wider community.
- I want to help make students feel seen, listened to, understood and cared for. This is especially important for the smaller communities in UL.



- Whether we realise it or not, we cannot thrive without a community. I believe a strong community bond at UL will enhance the student experience, even after graduation. If we work hard together, change is possible. I believe I have the experience to help our community and I'm excited to learn and grow with this role. UL is not a business, students come first!

THANK
YOU!



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