



# VOICES

Vol. 3 (2024-2025)

How we turned purpose, passion, and action into impact





Cover art by Julia Fawcett



## **VOICES Vol. 3**

### **Table of Contents**

<b>Who Needs Enemies When You've Got You?</b> Azaad Gill	<b>2</b>
<b>Finding My Place</b> Gayatri Sharma	<b>4</b>
<b>Redefining Leadership</b> George Triantafillakis	<b>6</b>
<b>Where Students Come to be Heard</b> Jenna Lam	<b>8</b>
<b>Leading on Brescia Hill</b> Maathangi Rudranantha	<b>10</b>
<b>Rachel's Story</b> Rachel Pizzonia	<b>12</b>
<b>Raised by Barriers, Driven by Purpose</b> Randall Tacata	<b>14</b>
<b>Ryan's Story</b> Ryan Malabanan	<b>16</b>
<b>Goodbye, Western</b> Sophia Ratanshi	<b>18</b>
<b>My Stage, My Story</b> Sophie Luo	<b>21</b>
<b>Beyond the Clinicals</b> Steve Xia	<b>23</b>



VOICES VOICES VOICES

VOICES VOICES VOICES

## Azaad Gill

# WHO NEEDS ENEMIES WHEN YOU'VE GOT YOU?

Have you ever stopped yourself from doing something—not because someone said you weren't allowed, but because you told yourself you couldn't? Maybe it was applying to your dream job, taking on a challenge, or just putting yourself out there. We often think the world is holding us back, when in reality, the loudest "No" is coming from inside our own heads.

The biggest lesson I learned being a student here at Western is that I am my own biggest supporter.

There are many situations where human

beings, due to their critical nature, stop themselves from doing certain things. Chances are, no one ever told you that you aren't allowed to be TikTok-famous or an entrepreneur. Often, humans limit their own potential, and if you are thinking this is you, don't worry; you are not alone. As renowned philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, the worst enemy you will meet is yourself.

Now, there are also reasons why humans do this: the main reason is to avoid embarrassment. So an opportunity that could be truly amazing is suddenly out of the picture because you have deemed that you cannot do it.

This does not always have to be the case. There are ways you can change your mindset to allow yourself to be open to new experiences and activities. But what good would this be if I didn't share an example.

I am going to tell you the story of how I ran my first half marathon. Sitting staring at the signup form, the thoughts were racing (pun intended): What if I fall? What if I am too slow? What if I can't finish? My brain was getting the best of me; you're too slow, none of your friends are doing it, \$200 is so expensive.

So, at that moment, I closed my laptop and went on with my day. I had made the decision that this was something that I could not do. After a couple of days my best friend asked if I had signed up, and I had mentioned that I didn't. He then used just two words that somewhat flipped my world upside down: "Why Not?"

At that moment, I thought about bringing up all the negative self-talk that I was giving myself, but I wasn't going to be that honest so I just had to respond with "because I told myself I couldn't." This came like a rush of clarity; no one was telling me I couldn't, it was me who was limiting myself. So I went home, and I signed up, no insurance, because I wasn't going to let myself back out.

Jump ahead to one week before that marathon, and I get sick. And I'm not talking about a minor cold, I mean used-up-a-whole-box-of-tissues-in-one-night kind of sick. This was it: the perfect excuse to get out of running the marathon. No one would blame me for not running if I was sick a week prior.

But the thought disappeared when my family, who didn't know I was sick, called me and said, "Big half-marathon coming up eh Can you believe you are the first one in our family to do something like this?" Being told that I would be the first to do something scratched that competitive itch, and I just had to do it.

Fast forward to me crossing the finish line, beating the goal I set for myself, and establishing myself as a major conversation topic at the next big family gathering. But deeper than that, I noticed a change, that voice in the back of my head that told me I couldn't do things was instead becoming my biggest cheerleader. I had proved all the negative self-talk wrong, I was not too slow, I did finish, and I even ended up seeing some friends I had made at Western at the race.

So if you take nothing else from this, take this: the next time you catch yourself thinking "I can't"—pause, and ask yourself "Who told me that?" If the answer is you, then it's time to challenge it. You have the power to be the reason you don't try—or the reason you keep going.

Because once you learn to silence that inner critic and amplify your inner cheerleader, the world is your oyster. And maybe, just maybe, you'll find yourself doing things you once thought were impossible—like running a half marathon, or even making the most of your university experience. Who knows maybe you will even have a fun story that helps impact other people here at Western.



VOICES VOICES VOICES

VOICES VOICES VOICES

**Gayatri Sharma**

## FINDING MY PLACE

Hi there, Western, Huron, and King's! My name is Gayatri Sharma, and I am a fourth-year Political Science student at Huron. I also serve as this year's USC Representative on the Huron University College Students' Council (HUCSC). As an international student, my journey at Western began on an unusual note. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and visa delays, I arrived in Canada on the last day of O-Week in 2021, missing not only a crucial introduction to university life but also my first two days of classes.

Instead of stepping into a lively, welcoming campus, I found myself navigating a new country, education system, and community on

my own. It was overwhelming. I wanted to be involved and to make connections, but I didn't know where to start.

Everything changed when I attended a HUCSC event at the Beaver Dam. It was a night of music, dancing, and a sense of warmth that, for the first time, made me feel at home. That moment stayed with me. I saw firsthand how a simple event could transform a student's experience, turning uncertainty into belonging. From that point on, I knew I wanted to create that same feeling for others.

Determined to make an impact, I became VP of Student Events for HUCSC in my second year.

My goal was to create fun, engaging, and welcoming experiences for Huron students, ensuring no one felt as lost as I had when I arrived. Throughout my term, I worked to organize events that fostered community and inclusion, making sure every student had opportunities to connect, celebrate, and feel like they belonged.

Then, by the end of my time as VP, I found the courage to do something I hadn't in my first year, but always wanted—explore Western's University Students' Council (USC). As an affiliate student, Western's main campus had always felt overwhelming and almost intimidating. I wanted to bridge that gap, not just for myself but for other Huron students. So, I became an Arts and Humanities Soph, an experience that introduced me to USC's countless resources and incredible community of students. That experience inspired me to run for USC Representative at Huron this year, and I did so with one clear mission: to make

Western more accessible and less daunting for Huron students.

Affiliate students often feel disconnected from Western, unsure of how to get involved or access the resources available to them. My mission was to change that. Since being elected, I have worked to bring Huron's voice to the USC, ensuring that affiliate concerns and perspectives are heard at the highest level. My goal has been to strengthen the connection between Huron and Western, working hard to ensure no student feels isolated or unheard.

One moment I truly felt like I was making an impact this year was when a Huron student told me that my HUCSC reports on the USC helped them stay informed about what was happening at Western. Though ordinary, this encounter made me believe that I had made an impact. I was truly happy, because I know what it's like to feel lost—and I know how powerful it is to finally feel like you belong.

Thank you for all of your time, efforts, and commitment to FHSSC throughout the 2024-2025 school year



VOICES VOICES VOICES

VOICES VOICES VOICES

## George Triantafillakis

# REDEFINING LEADERSHIP

## A JOURNEY FROM SELF-DOUBT TO IMPACT AT WESTERN

Coming out of high school, I was convinced I just wasn't one of those student leaders. I had been rejected from almost every position I applied to, and I was left feeling like maybe leadership just wasn't meant for me. But when I arrived at Western, something shifted.

I made the decision to apply to the Faculty of Health Sciences Students' Council (FHSSC), eventually becoming the First-Year Kinesiology Ambassador. What started as a tentative step soon became the foundation of a leadership journey I never imagined for

myself. Over the past five years, I've served in multiple roles: Councillor at Large, Vice President of Events, and eventually President of FHSSC. I had grown in confidence and experience, but it wasn't until I attended a health sciences leadership conference that I truly understood the magnitude of the impact I was making.

I was invited to the conference as President of FHSSC to represent Western. As I sat in sessions and listened to student leaders from across the country share stories about their



councils and campus challenges, I realized how much progress our council had made. Many students spoke about struggles we had already addressed: equity and inclusion, rebuilding community post-COVID, and increasing first-year engagement. I remembered all the motions we passed to make our council more sustainable, all the new roles we introduced to fill gaps, and the efforts we made to transition Brescia students into our faculty community with care and support. That moment was the first moment where I truly felt like I was making an impact or making a difference at Western.

Throughout my time on the FHSSC, I've worked hard to lead with empathy, clear communication, and purpose. I helped reintroduce career and degree panels after the pandemic, built new events like the FHSSC Blood Drive and Wellness Wednesday videos, and created transitional positions to make our council more representative of our faculty student body. I helped lead our newly founded Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee and worked to ensure that first-year students had meaningful opportunities to get involved and feel heard.

None of it was easy. Balancing the needs of over 75 council members while liaising with administration, setting strategic goals, and

supporting other student leaders required commitment, patience, and self-reflection.

Sitting at that conference and hearing from others, I felt something I hadn't let myself feel before: recognition, not from others but from myself. For the first time, I allowed myself to see my growth, leadership, and the real, lasting impact our work has had on campus life.

This moment affirmed to me that making a difference doesn't always look like standing on a stage or being the loudest voice in the room. Sometimes, it looks like consistently showing up, listening to your peers, making the hard calls, and building something that will outlast you. It looks like having difficult conversations, empowering others, and believing in your team. Most importantly, it looks like turning self-doubt into action and perseverance.

I walked away from that conference feeling more inspired and hopeful than ever before, not just about the work we'd done but about the future leaders we're now empowering through our council. My journey at Western has shown me that leadership is about impact, not titles. I hope my story encourages others to take the first step, even if they don't think they fit the mold because sometimes, the most unexpected leaders are the ones who make the greatest difference.



VOICES VOICES VOICES

VOICES VOICES VOICES

## Jenna Lam

# WHERE STUDENTS COME TO BE HEARD

I am currently the Peer Support Centre (PSC) Coordinator at the USC, and it has been so rewarding to help the community in this position by managing the centre and its volunteers. One of the first things I helped implement was our Peer Support Interaction Form, which allows volunteers to confidentially track when a student in need visits the PSC. Most of the time, volunteers are simply supervising the centre, waiting for someone to come in. When someone does, they fill out the form afterward to summarize the general nature of the interaction and flag if any additional wellness support might be needed.

Based on what volunteers shared, I read about

students dealing with grief, burnout, relationship issues, and the overwhelming pressure of being in university. These were students who were struggling silently and just needed someone to listen. It made me feel incredibly grateful that this centre exists, and that my role exists to help support it. Whenever I read this form, I feel like I am giving back to the Western community by helping create a space where students who are lonely or overwhelmed can find comfort, talk to someone, and feel heard.

Beyond that, I'm proud that this role also supports our amazing volunteers, and helps connect students to one another in meaningful

ways. In a time where so many people are craving connection, it means a lot to know that the PSC can be a place where that happens.

Throughout the year, we've also hosted events to support mental health in more lighthearted ways. From holiday crafts night to our big annual wellness fair, Prosper, we've tried to make wellness feel fun and accessible. At the Prosper fair, we had a petting zoo in the Mustang Lounge. I was walking around helping run the event when I overheard a student say, "My day just got so much better because of these animals."

It sounds so simple, but those moments matter. Being a student is really hard. Most of us live far from home. We're balancing classes, jobs, extracurriculars, and the pressure of an uncertain job market, etc. So if our events help even one person feel more at ease, it feels worth it.

Another thing I didn't expect was how meaningful the volunteer experience would be for our team. Many of our volunteers have told me they've made close friends through the centre and that they genuinely look forward to their shifts. The Peer Support Centre has become more than just a resource—it's turned into a cozy, welcoming third space on campus where students come not only to seek help, but also to study, relax, eat, or just hang out. People will drop in to chat, sit with a tea, or have a conversation that makes their day a little better. I love stopping by to check in on things, but I always end up staying longer because I get caught up talking with our volunteers. There's such a sense of comfort and connection in the room. It makes me proud to know that I've helped create a space that supports both the students reaching out and the ones giving their time to help.

Outside of the USC, I also work as a Residence Don. And while a lot of people see that as a disciplinary role, to me, it's about showing up for students as a real human being. Some of the most impactful moments this year have come from late-night hallway chats with students who are feeling overwhelmed by school or heartbroken

after a breakup. Sometimes we talk it out, sometimes we just play trivia or chill, but the point is, they don't have to go through it alone.

One of my favourite memories was organizing a game of Gotcha on my floor. It's basically a multi-day tag game and it ended up bringing so many people together on the floor who are not usually close. There were inside jokes, secret alliances, and actual friendships that formed because of that one silly game. We also did floor decorating, skating at Victoria Park, made a music video, and many events that we all genuinely had fun at!

I remember one moment during Fall Preview Day that really stuck with me. I was helping give a tour to prospective students and their families when a few of my own first-years came up to say hi. Some of the parents and students on the tour had just complimented my floor's theme—Club Penguin—and asked why some floors, based on the tour, feel more lively or connected than others.

Without hesitation, a few of my students overheard this question, came up to the group, and said that their first-year experience had been so much better because of me and the other two Sophs (shoutout to Azaad, the Grants and Recognition Coordinator who is a Soph for our floor and also Jasmine, who is not a part of the USC but worthy of mention too for being a great soph for our floor!). They shared that we helped create a strong sense of community and made the floor feel like home. It was such a small exchange, but it meant everything to me. Hearing that my efforts made a real difference in someone's first year was incredibly touching, and reminded me why building community matters so much.

If I've learned anything this year, it's that student leadership isn't just about resumes or responsibilities. It's about community. When you put yourself out there and get involved, you start to see just how much of a difference you can make. And in the process, you just might find your own little place on campus too.



VOICES VOICES VOICES

VOICES VOICES VOICES

## Maathangi Rudranantha

# LEADING ON BRESCIA HILL

## REFLECTIONS FROM A BRESCIA SOPH

Wearing our bright blue jerseys and with our whistles, as a Brescia Soph, I can never forget the lasting impacts and efforts we once made despite our small team.

During my third year, as a soph and the Brescia Students' Council's (BUCSC) Vice President of Events and Programming at the time, I had the opportunity to observe and facilitate both the behind-the-scenes and day-to-day operations of orientation. From the very first meeting of Brescia's Orientation Logistics Committee, I was part of a team that worked tirelessly

throughout the summer to create a Brescia OWeek to best serve incoming students.

From assembling Brescia OWeek Kits during NWeek (training week) to organizing and running Brescia OWeek events, helping host what would become the last Brescia Affilifest, running a dance workshop, and engaging tirelessly with first years and affiliate sops, being a Brescia soph was an experience that forever shaped my journey in student leadership. Being a part of the collective effort fueling the success of our OWeek at the top of

the hill was just one of the ways I firsthand felt myself representing the unity and spirit of our community.

Being a first time soph at the time, what kept me motivated and inspired was the infectious energy and passion of the Brescia Soph and Leadership Team. With a diverse team of individuals, each person on the team brought a unique lens to the team which helped us consistently show up for our first year students and each other throughout the week. By leading with resilience, empathy and creativity, I admired how our team worked together to go above and beyond to help our first-years transition. It was especially the late nights, honey roasts, and team energy that existed during our morning meetings when we helped each other get ready for the day, when I felt the strength of our team and orientation program.

From being a part of programming for international students during their bridging week and facilitating mature student socials to showcasing the diversity of London and Brescia by organizing a cultural fair with Brescia and Western cultural clubs and

Integrating various cultures into our daily movements programming, it was inspiring to be able to work alongside a team that highlighted the importance of inclusion, mentorship, and unwavering support in their programming development.

This experience showed me the dedication of student leaders and the larger Brescia community working together to create an environment in which new students feel welcomed, supported, and ready to begin their academic journeys. From completing multiple walk homes up Brescia Hill, to developing intentional programming and witnessing its impact on students' transition and comfort at Brescia, I continue to be inspired by the immense empathy, planning, and active engagement that helped us achieve our goals to this day.

Whether it was a conversation with a nervous first year and their family during move-ins, the successful events we ran, or the small moments of bonding with other sophs on the team, I am honoured and grateful to have been able to help positively shape someone's experience at Brescia.



**Rachel Pizzonia**

## **RACHEL'S STORY**

As a fifth-year graduating student in health sciences and business, I am beyond grateful to have served as a USC coordinator in my final year of university. Throughout my time at Western, I have been inspired by the Free the Dot program and its ability to address menstrual equity on campus.

Free the Dot, a menstrual equity initiative run by the University Students' Council (USC), aims to ensure students have free access to menstrual products, recognizing them as necessities rather than luxuries. It has been a privilege to work under the University Affairs portfolio and advocate for the importance of this program.

According to a 2023 Plan International Canada survey, 34% of Canadians under 25 who menstruate reported struggling to afford menstrual products. Sadly, thousands experience menstrual poverty, even within our campus community, suffering in silence. In the 2024-2025 school year, as VP of Student Affairs for my faculty council—the Faculty of Health Sciences Students' Council (FHSSC)—I oversaw the Menstrual Equity Hamper Program (MEHP), ensuring free access to menstrual products in all washrooms across our faculty buildings to promote equity and accessibility. Our team regularly restocked the bins, which were often empty, highlighting the program's necessity.

Today, Citron machines have largely replaced MEHP, ensuring menstrual products are distributed equitably and consistently replenished. With Citron Hygiene dispensers placed throughout campus and regularly refilled with essential period products, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact of this initiative in supporting students.

As Wellness Equity Coordinator for the USC, I have had the pleasure of contributing to the University Affairs portfolio by overseeing the program across the university and all faculties. Conversations with organizations such as the Women's Health Coalition of Canada and Period Purse, as well as discussions with students about the program's impact, reinforced that this initiative is truly making a difference and transforming lives.

So, when I learned that the future of funding for Free the Dot was uncertain, I was deeply saddened. A program so widely used by students was at risk of disappearing, leaving many without reliable access to essential menstrual products. Understanding its profound impact, I knew immediate action was necessary to secure its continued support and sustainability for future students.

When Mariana, VP of University Affairs (UA), proposed the idea of USC Menstrual Equity Day, I was thrilled to get involved. Advocating for the importance of the program alongside engaging activities—including Kahoot, matching games, giveaways, and a period simulator made the event even more impactful. It was incredible to witness students sharing positive experiences with the program, completing our surveys, and supporting our advocacy efforts.

Having the participation of student groups, the Wellness Equity Accessibility Committee, and the GenHealth Team reinforced how much this initiative resonated with students, further emphasizing the significance of menstrual equity on campus. Seeing students' enthusiasm, engagement, and firsthand stories of how the program has impacted their lives solidified that Free the Dot is more than just a service—it is a movement toward lasting change, and I am excited to see how it continues to evolve.

I am deeply grateful for the incredible individuals I have worked with throughout my time at USC and on Team UA. Thank you to the Wellness Equity Accessibility Committee for your support in running various initiatives during the second semester. To the other coordinators and the executive team, it has been a pleasure collaborating on initiatives that benefit Western students. To the full-time staff who continuously assisted in executing Wellness Equity events this year, I sincerely appreciate your dedication.

To Team UA, thank you for your inspiring advocacy work, speaking from the heart, and championing campus issues that matter to students. And lastly, to my incredible VP, Mariana, thank you for your unwavering support and hard work throughout the year. Your kindness and dedication have made a meaningful impact on Western's students, and I am truly grateful for you!

And with that, Rachel Pizzonia, Wellness Equity Coordinator of 2024-2025, is signing off. Thank you! 😊



VOICES VOICES VOICES

VOICES VOICES VOICES

## Randall Tacata

# RAISED BY BARRIERS, DRIVEN BY PURPOSE

My name is Randall, and I'm a Medical Sciences student at Western University with a deep passion for leadership, advocacy, and community-building. As an immigrant and first-generation student raised in a single-parent household, I've experienced firsthand the barriers that can make higher education feel out of reach.

When I arrived at Western, I was inspired by the energy of the campus and the support I received—but I also recognized the gaps. Many students from underrepresented backgrounds, including newcomers and low-income youth, still face challenges feeling seen, heard, and supported. That realization motivated me to

take action. Through my involvement with the Early Outreach Conference (REACH), USC Student Engagement, and the Western Recreation Centre, I've worked to build inclusive, empowering spaces where all students—regardless of their background—can find belonging, access opportunities, and recognize their potential.

When I first joined Western, I noticed how easily students from underrepresented backgrounds could feel isolated—academically, socially, and emotionally. Whether it was low-income youth unsure of their place in post-secondary spaces or students, like myself, who felt out of place in the gym or in positions of leadership, there was



a clear gap in representation, access, and belonging. I took this as a call to action.

Through the Early Outreach Conference (REACH), I worked directly with local students to demystify post-secondary education. We partnered with schools and community organizations to offer workshops, mentorship, and resources—showing youth that higher education is within their reach, regardless of socioeconomic barriers. It was a full-circle moment for me: I saw myself in these students, and it reaffirmed my belief that systemic change begins with community-based support and early intervention.

In my role as USC Campaigns Coordinator, I focused on student advocacy and engagement. Working with the Vice President of Student Engagement, I led campaigns that addressed equity, mental health, and student well-being. This role challenged me to think critically about the diverse needs of our campus and how to uplift voices that often go unheard. It taught me how to listen with intention, collaborate across differences, and lead with empathy.

At the Western Recreation Centre, I worked to break down barriers that prevent students—especially those who are new to fitness or feel unwelcome in gym spaces—from engaging in wellness. Having once been in their shoes, I

made it a priority to foster a welcoming, judgment-free environment.

These experiences pushed me beyond my comfort zone. They required vulnerability, courage, and a willingness to speak up and step forward. I've grown not only as a leader but also as someone committed to social change. They've shaped my vision for the future—one where I continue to advocate for equity, empower youth, and build communities where everyone feels they belong.

This journey has taught me that real change starts with empathy, persistence, and a willingness to show up for others. Each role I've held—whether organizing outreach for youth, leading campus-wide campaigns, or supporting students in the gym—has shown me the power of creating space for others to feel seen and valued. I view this experience as a success not because it was easy, but because it was impactful. The challenges I faced pushed me to grow into the kind of leader I once needed.

This story is deeply personal—it reflects my identity, my values, and my desire to uplift others. I hope those who hear it realize that no matter where you come from or what barriers you face, you have the power to make a difference. And in doing so, you make space for others to believe in themselves too.



VOICES VOICES VOICES

VOICES VOICES VOICES

**Ryan Malabanan**

# RYAN'S STORY

People always say, “Do something you love, and you’ll never have to work a day in your life.” I’ve heard that line a million times, on posters, in speeches, and passed around like some magical life mantra. I never thought much of it...until I found myself at 2 a.m., knee-deep in Google Sheets, reviewing showcase itineraries and screaming at people’s unfathomable lighting cues for Hip Hop Western (HHW). It should’ve felt like work. But it didn’t. Because I wasn’t just showing up for dance, I was showing up for a purpose.

That was when it hit me: HHW wasn’t just a club to me; it was filled with passion, community, and belonging. And somehow, I

was steering it. My name is Ryan Malabanan (he/him), and I am honoured to have had the privilege of serving as Hip Hop Western’s 2024/25 President.

I’ve always loved being involved. A USC Councillor. A Residence Don. While I’ve loved all these roles and all their impact, leading HHW was the first time I got to lead something that connected my personal passion with a broader impact.

When I took on this presidency, I knew I wanted to push the club further: not just as a dance club, but as a force for community. A core aspect of my leadership became integrating

charity into our DNA. Hip hop, at its roots, was never just about the music or the moves—it was a movement. It was a way for at-risk youth to express their identity and find unity in dance. I wanted to honour that legacy by giving back in the same spirit.

So, we made service part of our mission. Driven by a purpose to create something greater, I spearheaded the club's first intercollegiate dance showcase, donating a portion of our proceeds to a local non-profit organization. All in all, this event was a statement of what HHW could achieve when driven by purpose. However, impact doesn't always show up in dollar signs.

At Western, I've met hundreds of students with hidden, untapped creativity. People who didn't think they were good enough. Students who have never danced but have always wanted to. What I noticed early on was that it wasn't a lack of passion... it was a lack of space. A space that said, you belong here—so we built it.

I remember, in particular, a few students during this showcase who I'd describe as introverted and reserved. However, as soon as they stepped on stage, they took on a whole new persona atypical of them, dancing with never-seen-before energy. Moments like these remind me that creating space for growth is just as important as any performance.

I didn't do it alone, of course. I worked with an incredible exec team and dancers who believed in the vision, but I'm proud that I helped steer the ship. That I didn't just lead for

the sake of organizing events, but for the sake of love. Love for dance, and a love for community. More importantly, love for what happens when students come together with a shared purpose and a little spark in their hearts.

I'm especially thankful for my 60+ person team because what people don't often see is the behind-the-scenes hustle. The hours spent coordinating events. The emails, meetings, budget planning—and yes, the occasional venue fiasco. But none of it ever felt like “work.” Because when purpose is aligned with passion, every late night becomes fuel, not fatigue.

Beyond Hip Hop Western, being a Don and a USC Councillor helped me see leadership from different angles. Sometimes you lead with policy, sometimes with empathy, and sometimes with a playlist and a JBL speaker. Each role taught me that impact isn't always loud; sometimes it moves quietly, like the ripple of someone realizing they belong.

Western is a big place, and it's easy to feel like just another face in the crowd. But this made it all feel personal. What I've now come to realize is that making a difference doesn't always have to be advocacy. It can look like the Social Science tunnels full of students laughing while dancing.

To me, Hip Hop Western is a community of movers, dreamers, and doers who remind me that I am not just doing what I love. I am helping others do what they love, too. That's the real impact. Not just in what I do, but in what I help make possible. And that's the kind of rhythm I'll always want to move to.



VOICES VOICES VOICES

VOICES VOICES VOICES

**Sophia Ratanshi**

# GOODBYE, WESTERN

As I step out of my last USC Council meeting and pause to reflect on this moment, tears fill my eyes. It's hard to believe this chapter is closing. I think back to why I ran for this position, the purpose behind everything I did, and the impact I dreamed of making. These final words are for the USC, for the Western Undergraduate Students, and for my home and community at FIMS. But more than that, this message is for anyone who has ever wanted to make a difference—whether you're an incoming student, a current student, or anyone ready to create change.

The USC motto, “*Students have the Power to Change the World*”, has never felt more real to

me than it does now. And here's how.

**Euphoria. Accomplishment. Pride.**

These are the emotions that come with being a change-maker—someone who drives progress and creates a positive impact. I've been fortunate to experience that spark of change, and to watch it grow and evolve from that very first step I took at Western.

**Let me take you back to the beginning.**

My name is Sophia Ratanshi. Over the past four years, I've worn many hats—Frosh Representative, Religious Education

Coordinator, Vice President of Events for the Ismaili Student Association, two-time member of an all-girls competitive a cappella team, choreographer for a Dance Team, and model for WICSA's fashion show. I've worked with Western's Consulting Club, competed in BRDRless Dance, and served as the FIMS Student Council President for the past two years.

But when I look back, those titles don't tell the whole story. They only represent the places where change happened.

### **So, when did I truly realize I was making an impact at Western?**

One thing Western taught me was how to tell a good story. So, let me show you.

It all began with one of the first events I helped host as FIMS President: the Western University FIMS Open House. I walked into a room filled with eager students and their families, all discussing what the transition into university would be like. I could feel the excitement in the air—the anticipation of newfound freedom, the allure of the Western University stereotype.

But as I stood there, something clicked. To me, university wasn't just about that freedom. It was a time for growth, for discovering new talents and passions, and for leaving the university better than we found it. Through my four years here, I learned that if we open ourselves up to new opportunities, actively seek areas to develop, and leverage the resources available to us, we can create meaningful change.

As I sat at the front of that room, looking out at all the future Mustangs, a wave of gratitude washed over me. I wasn't just there to inspire them; they were my inspiration. I saw myself in their places—my younger self, full of questions

and hopes. Their eyes reflected the same anticipation I once felt when I first stepped on campus, and in that moment, I knew I was exactly where I was meant to be.

### **But it wasn't just about giving advice. It was about being real.**

As an incoming first-year, I would have wanted a mentor who gave me honest, transparent advice about Western—not just the surface-level stuff, but the highs, the lows, and everything in between. I had a unique perspective, having pivoted my academic path midway through university. I knew I could offer something valuable to others.

So, I shared my experiences at the Open House—how joining student council and engaging with clubs helped me shape my university life. It wasn't just about standing up and speaking; it was about being approachable, about making sure everyone felt welcomed and included in the conversation. I wanted to be that mentor I never had.

### **From there, the impact grew.**

Throughout my presidency, I embraced the role of a spokesperson—not just for recruitment but to encourage ongoing involvement. I actively engaged with families, talking to them about how students could make the most of their time at Western, not just by getting involved, but by growing as leaders and contributors to the community throughout their university years.

On a more personal level, my role as FIMS President allowed me to advocate for all students, especially those entering FIMS. I made it my mission to create an inclusive space where all voices could be heard. I shared advice on courses, academic trajectories, and the overall student experience. As Chair of the Undergraduate Student Services Committee

(USF), I worked on how best to prioritize funds to serve the FIMS community and collaborated on internal committees to represent students' concerns while launching new initiatives and ideas.

I had the privilege of making valuable connections within the FIMS community, both through hosting and organizing events. As the emcee for the FIMS Career Conference, I connected students with alumni and faculty, facilitating conversations that bridged the gap between past and present students. In addition, I ideated and launched the FIMS trip and coordinated several other events, all aimed at fostering a sense of community and providing students with opportunities to engage with one another and with faculty.

But it wasn't just about events. I took my passion for advocacy and policy work to the broader university. At USC Day, I encouraged students from all faculties to get involved and make their voices heard. It felt like my influence was growing, not just within FIMS but across Western.

### **And then, I took that role beyond Western.**

In my role as the Undergraduate Student Representative on the Quality Assurance Committee for Huron University, I had the opportunity to make an impact across multiple program modules. I reviewed the Global Studies Program, consulted with faculty and students, read through over 150 pages of textbooks, and provided recommendations for improvement. This was a huge responsibility,

but it also expanded my perspective on how far student voices can reach—how our collective input can shape the educational experience for everyone.

### **Looking back, what strikes me most is how these seemingly small moments grew into something bigger.**

From answering a single student's question at an Open House to guiding an entire faculty, each step of my journey has been part of a larger mission: improving the university experience for everyone. And in doing so, I learned something incredibly valuable—change doesn't always have to start with something monumental. It can begin with a single conversation, an honest moment of connection, a spark of inspiration.

Serving in these roles has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life. It all started with a simple desire: to leave Western better than when I arrived. And along the way, I discovered that we, as students, truly do have the power to change the world—even if it's just one step at a time.

To everyone reading this, to those who want to make a change: Start small. Start now. And eventually, you'll find yourself doing bigger things.

This is the end of my story.

**From your FIMSSC President,**

Sophia Ratanshi - Out.



VOICES VOICES VOICES

VOICES VOICES VOICES

**Sophie Luo**

# MY STAGE, MY STORY

## A JOURNEY OF VOICE, VULNERABILITY, AND IMPACT

*“You need to lose weight – start skipping rope 100 times a day!”*

I was ten when my gymnastics coach said that to me.

She said it casually, like it was just another piece of advice, but those words stuck with me and quietly reshaped the way I saw myself—both in and outside the gym.

As I got older, the feeling of not belonging never really went away. When I transitioned from gymnastics to competitive dance in

elementary school, I still felt like the odd one out. I was usually the only Asian girl in a room full of tall, skinny white girls who seemed to fit the mold. Coaches made both subtle and not-so-subtle comments about my body, and I started to associate being accepted with being perfect. No matter how hard I worked, I began to believe I’d never be good enough and that I simply wasn’t built for dance.

When I got to Western, I auditioned for two competitive dance teams and didn’t make either. I was crushed—it felt like confirmation of

everything I had believed growing up and I was convinced my dance journey was over.

During Clubs Week, I walked past the UWO Dance Force booth and found out it was a recreational, charity-based dance club open to dancers of all backgrounds and experience levels. No competitions, no pressure—just community and self-expression.

Something about that clicked with me. I joined that year not expecting much, but from the very first class, the environment was supportive, inclusive, and fun. For the first time, I danced not to be the best, but simply to feel.

The real impact I felt like I made at Western came a year later when I became a choreographer and proposed a new inter team focused on Modern (dance style) and improvisation, creating a space where dancers could express themselves artistically and emotionally. I choreographed pieces centered on trust, vulnerability, and creative freedom, with each class beginning with across-the-floor improv that encouraged dancers to feel their movement instead of focusing on how they looked. Each dance told an open-ended story up to personal interpretation.

Stepping into this creative role pushed me to trust my instincts and grow as a leader, which wasn't easy, but every time a dancer grew more confident or felt like my class was a safe space, I knew I was doing something right. Improv, in particular, is uncomfortable for many dancers as it asks you to trust yourself without set choreography—but that's exactly the environment I wanted to build: one rooted in instinct, emotion, and self-trust.

This past year, our Modern dance team featured 24 dancers – a huge leap from the 7 who joined when I first started it. What made this year even more special was getting to co-choreograph with my younger sister—someone who grew up with me and understands me on a different level. Before we stepped on stage, we gave our team a pep talk and teared up backstage, overwhelmed by how much it meant to finally share that moment together.

Four years later, standing under the stage lights as part of this silly little club that reshaped how I see myself as a dancer and a leader, I took my final bow and held back tears. For once, I was genuinely proud of myself.

Afterward, dancers told me the class helped them reconnect with their love for dance and regain confidence. Some even said they felt inspired to choreograph—something they never imagined doing. That's when I realized success isn't about perfection; it's about creating a space where people feel empowered and understood. The saying goes: "To be loved is to be seen." And, in that studio, on that stage, we saw each other. Not just as dancers, but as people with stories, insecurities, and strength.

I often think back to being ten, told my body needed fixing and that I had to skip rope 100 times a day to be enough. It shattered me. But here, Dance Force taught me that real impact lives in trust, belonging, and how you make people feel. I'll always be proud of the space I helped create—one where people felt safe to take up space—because in doing that for others, I finally did it for my ten-year-old self too.





VOICES VOICES VOICES

VOICES VOICES VOICES



**Steve Xia**

# BEYOND THE CLINICALS

## THE LIFE OF NURSING STUDENTS

It was 11:40 p.m. on a Saturday. I had just finished a round of medication administration, assessments, and finished catching up on my charting. I sat down, stretched my legs, and took a sip of water. It was going to be a good time to take a stab at 100 pages of microbiology before a call bell went off or the IV line started beeping.

Being a nursing student is challenging, especially with placements in upper years. Balancing responsibilities as a health care provider, student, friend, and person would take a significant toll on anyone. Many of us sacrifice sleep and social lives to keep up during our three-week placement blocks. Our

courses are difficult and extensive, but they prepare us for environments where any error can prove fatal.

It takes a special heart to pursue a nursing career. Not only are we exposed to the physical manifestations of the most diverse biomedical diagnoses, but also the rooted social factors that make people sick. Even though we learn extensively about the Social Determinants of Health, we sometimes feel powerless to change our systems.

7:00 a.m. hits. For some it's hometime, but for others it's a class or an exam. A day-day-night-night schedule is very common, and many of us

are completely unavailable in our three-week placement blocks.

The physical aspects of nursing are undeniable, but the emotional weight is just as heavy. We build bonds with patients, only to witness their suffering or their final moments. Even with the emotional groundwork laid in our theory classes, nothing can truly prepare us for these mentally challenging aspects. We carry many moments with us, even as we try to set boundaries.

It's 5 p.m., and I just woke up from 6 hours of quality sleep. After a quick meal, it's time to go in again. Day in, day out. This is the life of nursing students.

Amidst the difficulties, there are moments of profound meaning, like when a patient squeezes your hand in gratitude or when a family thanks you for making their loved one comfortable in their last hours.

Considering how busy nursing schedules can get, any community involvement from nursing students should be valued. From sopping, student councils, clubs, and varsity sports, nursing students sacrifice so much just to get involved elsewhere. Balancing these commitments alongside a demanding program requires resilience, time management, and unwavering dedication to our profession and peers.

Despite our packed schedules, many nursing students take on leadership roles, advocate for healthcare improvements, and volunteer in ways that extend far beyond the hospital walls. We bring our unique perspectives to every new experience, shaped by witnessing the realities of patient care, health inequities, and high-pressure environments. Whether mentoring first-year students, organizing wellness initiatives, or contributing to policy discussions, our presence strengthens the communities we serve.

Yet, our community involvement often comes at a cost. Unlike students in other faculties, we juggle clinical shifts that don't follow traditional schedules, making it difficult to participate in meetings and events. Still, we persist because we know that the advocacy, leadership, and teamwork skills we build will make us better nurses and better people. This is the impact I want to highlight. Nursing students are not just caregivers at the bedside. We are changemakers in every space we step into, bringing with us compassion, critical thinking, and a deep understanding of human needs.

My name is Steve, and I am a third-year nursing student. I'm proud to highlight one of Western's most unique programs. Next time you talk to a nursing peer, please consider our challenges and commitments. For those who choose this path, it's not just a career—it's truly a calling. Reflecting back, I know I wouldn't have chosen anything else.





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