

Thank you, (Mr. Bisset) for the opportunity to speak to the board today about something I'm so passionate about. That's the Association of Student Governments. ASG is an incredibly special group not just because it brings 17 campuses, their student body presidents and other school delegates together, but more importantly because of the issues we face and focus on together in representing over 220,000 students.

Last session, the Association of Student Governments overhauled our governing documents to reflect a student-advocate model for the first time in our 43 year history. But the question is how do we define advocacy -- and what does that mean?

First and foremost we are student advocates as diplomats, not activists. The Association is focused not only on raising awareness, which isn't enough, but also coupling that with tangible actions that we can accomplish by "filling the gap" between administrations and our student leaders to better align ourselves and our resources to these shared goals.

The five main goals we have set looking forward and where we see students serving as advocates and leaders on their campus includes in a bipartisan effort include: mental health awareness, sexual assault awareness, issues of diversity, affordable access to college, and get out the vote efforts.

At last month's meeting our constituent campuses met at UNC-CH to focus on Voter Education and Engagement. We brought students (inside and outside of ASG) together for an event that included presentations from students, groups in the community, as well as the Mayor of Chapel Hill and a CH Councilmember. We see this direct engagement and interaction with our representatives and our constituents from a grass-roots as crucial to our success. Sometimes it's easy for our Association to drift away and become too far removed from our constituents' concerns, all of our primary constituents, the students. But we have to stay focused.

My main focus this year is specifically on the issue of mental health, not just because it is the main focus of myself and the Student Body Presidents this year, but more importantly because it is the number one threat to the safety and the security of our students. The National Alliance on Mental Illness reports that more than 25% of college students have been diagnosed with a mental illness *in the past year alone*.

Mental health is deeply intertwined in the fabric of our campuses and many of our campus problems stem directly or indirectly from mental health issues: sexual assault awareness, issues of diversity, college access and affordability, degree completion, campus safety and other areas that this increasing problem ripples to. Next month, we will have our first system-wide advocacy week led by NCSU where all 17 campuses will to aim hold small events personalized to their campus based on what mental health struggles they face on their respective campuses. We've heard proposals that range from an awareness message at a Nov. NCCU football game, while others are planning town halls with local leaders, TED talks, local film screenings and other exciting ideas collaborating with with our schools' administrations.

It's not only about getting more students into the health centers but it's about a broader culture shift in the way students view themselves to shift into a more mindful, healthy and active lifestyle. There's a quote I'd like to share from the novel *Choke* that underscores this need for a change in how we operate:

“nothing is as perfect as you can imagine it. Because it's only intangible ideas, concepts, beliefs, fantasies that last. Stone crumbles. Wood rots. People, well, they die. But things as fragile as a thought, a dream, a legend, they can go on and on. If you can change the way people think. The way they see themselves. The way they see the world. you can change the way people live their lives. That's the only lasting thing you can

create.” College should be a place to foster those dreams and encourage us to Think and Do.

I want to close by thanking you for your time and attention, for your sincere dedication to the students of this system, and the passion we all share in wanting to improve higher education. I look forward to the work we can do together over this next semester and in the years ahead, long after I’m gone, on these incredibly pressing issues.