

# THE NEW FACE OF ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF MADISON

The organization's strides for student justice and representation amid battles with university administration

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BY CAROLINE ROBSON

Student voices on the UW-Madison campus have long been silenced, and the Associated Students of Madison is vying for a new identity of passionate advocacy and strong voices under the leadership of chair Matthew Mitnick.



Matthew Mitnick, chair of Associated Students of Madison. Photo provided by Mitnick.

"I got involved because I wanted to make a change on campus. I was tired of seeing the administrators manipulate and use these very strategic tactics to essentially get their way every single time and suppress the student voice. They would treat students as these transient populations," Mitnick said.

Over the years, Associated Students of Madison, the student governance body on campus, has been a lead of student advocacy on campus to better the student experience and make changes on behalf of student voices. However, there has been a lack of autonomy for the organization, which has presented a problem when challenging the administration.

"It is really problematic that if the Associated Students of Madison or students in general disagree with the university on something it is still the university that has jurisdiction over that, and would theoretically represent them," Mitnick said.

This year, the organization proposed a COVID-19 relief package to disperse funds to students who are facing housing insecurity. The university administration rejected this package over multiple legal concerns. ASM leaders then attempted to work with the administration's feedback and create a workaround to be able to disperse the funds, which was again shut down.

The fight for passing this package is far from through. ASM is continuing to try to work with university regulations, which Mitnick claims are ridiculous and self-serving to the administration.

"It is a shame that this university continues to use students as cash cows just to profit off of, and when we're in a pandemic and the importance is being placed on 'how do the stakeholders feel?' and 'how does the alumni association feel?' rather than students," Mitnick said.

Taking this issue to court was something ASM considered. However, they would be represented in court by a legal team affiliated with the University. This lack of autonomy from the university administration is challenging the idea that ASM is a way for students to have their voices listened to and acted on.

Many issues that students bring up to the administration that they are not set to deal with

get pushed to the side. It can be difficult for students at a large university to speak up to an administration that sees them as a transient individual who will leave in a few short years. ASM is leading the fight in student justice and representation against what they feel is an unfair administration.

"It's just about student autonomy over student dollars. We should have the ability to say as elected student leaders by our peers that this is how we want to spend our money that we paid into," Mitnick said.

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While still advocating for and actively working on the COVID-19 relief fund for this semester, ASM is looking ahead to next year to try to set up an office of student legal services to be able to be represented by their own team of lawyers and legally advocate for student voices on campus with full autonomy.

By bringing these issues to light that the organization has faced in trying to represent student voices, Mitnick along with other leaders hope to make real change that will last beyond their short years at Madison. If successful, their plans could change the way that student voices are heard and represented to the administration.