

Semester Report: Fall 2015

Background:

This report is a summary of work done in the Fall 2015 semester, and includes but is not limited to major projects, milestones, key activities, and challenges. It includes recommendations for future members of the Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) Board of Directors and students at large who are involved with the activities of the SFSS.

AGM

The VP Services is responsible for planning the SFSS AGM, so I did that with support from the board and staff. This was a difficult year to plan the meeting because we decided to take questions regarding the Build SFU project forward. It was the third time we had asked questions regarding the project at a General Meeting, and had it failed, we would have ended the project. Staff support was fantastic. While overseeing this, I creating the script for the meeting, coordinated with the external chairperson, helped with creating the messaging for the meeting, and the annual report. There was also some work was in the delegating student outreach.

We selected and assigned board members to engage with specific student groups, helped some of them better articulate the message and worked with people to write their scripts. The board did a fantastic job up to, during, and after the meeting when enjoying the success. The board succeeded even though many members of the board and staff were nervous, scared, and in a few cases had lost hope. There were many challenges, but it got done and everything was successful. In managing the budget, I'm very glad we finished ~\$5,000 under-budget (we spent ~\$10,00/\$15,000), because that money can now be reallocated to add value elsewhere.

I have kept everything in one report for my successor with recommendations. In sum: it's okay to say no to people who make unreasonable demands. There is nothing inherently wrong with conducting important business at an AGM, though people may not like it (and will tell you how they feel about you for it in a room of 550+ students). Find the balance between getting important business done and the impact on the reputation of the SFSS if there's controversy around such a meeting. Legally speaking, an AGM is the highest possible mechanism to conduct a vote, remember that.

My thanks goes out to everyone involved, and the NotoBUILDSFU campaign for helping us create a better project and a better process behind it. I could not be prouder of our board for leading the SFSS in this victory, the staff for this amazing support, and our students being the key to changing history at SFU.

UPass BC

The first SFSS service consultation was done this year, which I am very proud of because it was for our most important service. I did this with SFSS Arts Representative Arr Farah and it was successfully completed. We met with over 20 student groups and over 300 unique students in person. In context you can compare this to the Build SFU consultation held last year, which met with 144 students with possible overlap.

We chose to meet with students in person to validate assumptions we made about how interested students are in to better understand their insights into the program and the transition from paper-passes to the Compass Card. Many of the assumptions I made regarding consulting students were validated; specifically,

students are happy to be consulted as long it's convenient, the message is brief, simple, and clear, and they know their time's not going to waste. Consulting students to check boxes is pointless; however, involving them in a manner that shows them how their input is being used to help get things done is appreciated.

We met with TransLink to discuss the compass card though little resulted from the conversation aside from congratulations and appreciation for our consultation. Meetings were typically SFU representatives and I reminding TransLink of their commitments and passing on student complaints. The U-Pass BC Advisory Committee met to put everyone on the same page and receive an update on the contract. The update was that we would receive it soon, though it has taken TransLink quite some time to send it.

I met with SFU and the GSS to adjudicate opt-out appeals, and was briefly involved in the restructuring of the opt-out categories. The changes were for the 1% of the 5% total number of opt-outs SFU is allotted for discretionary use (SFU specific opt-out categories). The categories needed to be adjusted in order to stay within our contractual obligations of allowing only 1% of opt-outs under those categories. This change will likely create many complaints from students who will no longer qualify for an opt-out, especially if they had qualified previously.

There have been many challenges in this process, but they have been reasonably mitigated. The U-Pass Advisory Committee could add much more value, there is a significant difference in interest and participation, TransLink is rather slow, and some student associations from my perspective are either confused and don't want to admit it, or are missing the point entirely.

This program adds major value, everyone is glad that it exists, but there needs to be a clear plan in place to work with TransLink to keep this program in place. We are currently pursuing a two year extension and the SFSS will have to work with SFU to keep the focus on continuing with a sustainable plan. We need to reach that point by working **with** TransLink. While people don't necessarily realize it, TransLink cares about providing a good service and wants to do a good job. Work well with them gives us the best chance of preserving the U-Pass BC program, and actually working with them to address services issues that may have nothing to do with the U-Pass.

Health and Dental Plan

Work on the plan this semester as limited to analyzing old reports, current agreement, and trying to find a strategic way forward to extract maximum value for the SFSS and students within the current structure of the deal. The reports regarding the opt-out period and the annual claims came closer to the end of the semester, and are currently being analyzed. Coverage may be adjusted as needed based on this analysis.

Our broker has been notified that nobody in the SFSS will be accepting gifts and they have been asked to stop sending us gifts unless there is a direct exchange of value associated with a trade. There are malicious intentions from our broker, this is standard in business, but it's important that this message be given to them. Gifts suggest leverage and nobody wants to give the image that we work with a company because of the gifts they send to our board members. It makes everybody look bad, when Student Care is the top provider of student plans, and we have been working with them for years.

The original memorandum we have with our insurance broker needs to be adjusted so the SFSS gets more value. The term of the agreement is very long, and there is an automatic extension included in the agreement that needs to be removed. There were many complaints with opt-outs this year, though the number of opt-outs remained relatively the same. Students say they never got e-mails, but when investigated, it was clear they did get the information e-mails reminding people to opt-out. In cases where they did not (such as a late

enrolment), exceptions could be made. Most the time, opt-out complaints for younger students are submitted by their parents, because the students don't manage their own money and don't check their e-mails.

Build SFU

Following the success of the AGM the board assigned the President, VP University Relations, and I to follow through with the work require to complete the subsequent stages of the project, and to keep the board informed on this progress. Typically board members do not become too intimately involved in the details of the work related to this project; however, the board this year decided that it would like that to change and appointed the three of us.

Our work has been to review documents, attend meetings related to the project, and to create strategies on how to get the most out of the process for students. This work involved addressing items that needed to be changed in documents SFU believed the board had already agreed to, which it had not. The meetings were initially rather difficult in the conversation because the SFSS would have five people at the table while SFU had almost a dozen.

This work is very time-consuming, requires a lot of thought, and can be mentally draining. The work is valuable, and so I hope that we can continue on this great progress.

CEO Evaluation

While not part of the VP Services role, I designed a process, and a feedback loop regarding the evaluation of the CEO. This is one of the main functions of a board of directors, and while it is the role of the president, my experience in Human Resources and board experience made it easy for me to complete. CEO evaluation is critical to the success of the SFSS, the process I designed is the first performance management process this organization has ever had. The point is to provide feedback so our CEO may do a better job, and the actual evaluation work will be passed on to the President in the Spring Semester. The key is to remember that the performance of the CEO = organizational performance.

Board Evaluations

I created the first process the SFSS has ever had for formal board evaluations. It has not yet been adopted, but my hope is that it will be. It will help board members, and the board as a body, do a much better job. The focus is on ways to improve, not punishment for wrong doing, because there is no way of effectively punishing people on board (barring conflicts of interest and impeachment). It will lessen the learning curve, give people a foundation for future careers, and have the board show staff that in the same way that it evaluates others, it is willing to evaluate itself.

Accessibility Fund Advisory Committee

Improving on accessibility at SFU is essential to a better campus experience, helping engage more students, and generally improving the quality of life for many people as they go through university. It's a real shame that the way this committee has been granting money for the last few years is broken. There is no accountability, no thresholds in place, no process aside from 5-7 people sitting in a room subjectively deciding how to spend a \$450,000 budget with no oversight in place, nor any training provided. If you're

friends with board members, or can demonstrate that you will make the board look bad if it doesn't give you money, you'll probably get it at AFAC and that's typically how things work.

This year, the SFSS and other staff have been tasked with creating a proper fund distribution process, that alleviates the issue described above, and takes other things into consideration, such as how the work of the committee relates to the mandate of the SFSS, and a report delivered by the people who received on the money on the results. This is not to stifle people, but to have a fair process in place that lets the board demonstrate adherence to its fiduciary duty, while helping students and staff fulfill the mandate of the committee.

Office of the Ombudsperson

Work relating to this office is confidential, but suffice it to say that been outstanding issues from last year, since the previous board recommended we withdraw from the agreement to fund this office. While the recommendation was rejected due to a lack of documented information, I have been working to re-present the information to the board to satisfy the request of the new board. There have been unforeseen delays since the Summer semester, but the work is picking up and there should be an announcement next semester regarding how the SFSS will move forward with its portion in this jointly funded office.

Conclusion

There is much more that could be added to this report, but this speaks to the highlights of the work done in the previous semester. Questions may be submitted to vpsservices@sfss.ca. My thanks to those who took the time to read this report.