

### Kathleen Yang

VP External Relations Board of Directors

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# <u>Vice President External Relations – Fall 2015 Work Report</u>

### **External Relations:**

Government Relations: In October I complied and presented the SFSS' annual budget recommendations to the Provincial governments standing committee on Finance and Government Services. The presentation had 4 key asks in regards to Open Textbook funding, deferred maintenance, ensuring post-secondary institutions can self-finance capital projects and increases to capital funds. All of our recommendations were included in the final report.

Other Student Associations: I have attended a few meetings with folks from the Alliance of BC Students in regards to planning for a Spring lobby days. At these meetings I provide feedback and make recommendations from the SFSS perspective. It remains to be seen whether a lobby days will be realized. The BC government's amendments to Bill 41 raised alarm bells for student associations across the province as the amendments were thought to jeopardize our ability to collect fees. This led to much communication between myself and other student associations to determine how best to articulate our views. This ended with the SFSS, GSS and SFU filing a joint submission to the province to ensure current fees would be collected. There was an attempt on my part host a neutral meeting with all student associations (Canadian Federation of Students [CFS] affiliated and non-affiliated) this was ultimately determined by the Advocacy committee to be unnecessary.

I still don't know how worth it is to work with other student associations, it's difficult to be effective unless everyone is truly coordinated into advocating for the exact same thing (which is something the CFS is good at) but at the same time you don't want to lose your own unique perspectives (something this CFS is not good at). Amidst planning for an election campaign I really wanted to see us be part of a larger provincial or national campaign, however as I realized after speaking with various multi post-secondary associations, it might never be possible for the SFSS to be part of such an organization due to our size and brand. SFU is well known and our student population makes membership with an organization that collects fees a lucrative opportunity. Unfortunately the age old dilemma remains whether larger schools deserve more decision making power due to larger financial contributions or whether every school receives equal say regardless of size. The dominant thought today suggests that with our size and access to resources we don't need to be part of any other multi-organization. As a collectivist, I'm uncertain whether this is the best approach, but I don't have any other thoughts or recommendations at this time.

Further External Communications:

I still write media statements and take interviews when necessary, submitting it to the CEO and board for feedback. I'll usually create a messaging document, send it out then reference it during the interview. Sticking to the message is key.

This was quite the busy semester as a result of the election as everyone wanted "the student perspective" and I guess people liked what I had to say on account of the amount of interviews I did? I didn't do an interview with CBC on behalf of the SFSS, but I'm sure my role helped land me the radio and tv interview. Doing media has actually been a really good experience and unexpectedly pleasant adventure in this role.

## **Advocacy:**

Federal Election campaign: During the month of October we raised awareness about the upcoming federal election in conjunction with the Council of Canadians and Check your Head! We didn't really partner with any external non-profits, but I was able to complete a number of media interviews to highlight the work of the SFSS and the Advocacy committee and the Arts Rep organized a great all candidate debate for Burnaby North Seymour.

Translink Consultation: In part with the Sustainable Mobility Advisory committee, it was raised that Translink was planning on making a number of changes to the 145, 144 and 135 routes, eliminating the residence bus stop and changing the route in which buses would circulate on campus. The university administration did not like these changes and enlisted our help to promote translink's consultation survey which was made public between October 13 and November 6, encouraging students to fill it out and provide feedback. We distributed over 3000 leaflets and had 6.2% of students click our bit.ly link. Translink reported to have received 11 000 responses from the general public but has not released any updates on whether their proposed plans have changed.

Residence and Housing: After much mention of a 20 year master residence plan, SFU was finally able to publicize the 76 page report which failed to include any mention of family or affordable housing. During their consultations held throughout November and it was stated by the Director of Student Affairs and Executive Director of Residence and housing that the reason why it was mentioned was because SFU was looking to partner with UniverCity to address family housing. I followed up with the <a href="mailto:residence\_plan@sfu.ca">residence\_plan@sfu.ca</a> email indicating the SFSS's desire to be part of family housing conversations in December, I have yet to hear back. There are full notes available from their one day consultation (labeled: "Residence Master Plan Meeting Notes" in the google drive and email inbox).

National Energy Board preparations and related meetings with the Graduate student society were ongoing throughout this semester. We were originally going to present this semester but hearings were postponed once again due to NEB related issues.

A *Sexual Assault Support Centre* Working Group has formed with the hopes of creating a SASC at SFU. This group includes SFU students and community staff members. I have assisted them with connecting them to folks on campus, ensuring their completion of a provincial grant to help get a sexual assault support worker on campus and hope to continue to support their completed proposal in the coming year.

I also did some research to determine the feasibility of having an *SFSS peer support program*. I contacted Martin Mroz who oversaw the former SFU Nightline program and Speakeasy, the UBC peer support program. Currently, unless we create a whole new department with dedicated staff, a peer support program does not seem feasible. Students would probably appreciate the opportunity to volunteer for such a program, but unless we can mechanisms are in place to ensure a program is done well, I will not be taking steps to create a such a program. Thus my focus has now turned to hosting workshops related to peer support.

TSSU Strike: Throughout this semester there was a TSSU strike, I create various media statements, continued to relay information from the TSSU to members when necessary. Grade withholding occurred, but the SFSS ultimately didn't make much of a statement until the strike was over. Looking back I guess this was a bit of a wasted effort.

Food bank program: I tried to get the Food and Access committee which was comprised of a number of SFU staff members, unfortunately there did not seem to be much interest in between the email list issues. Perhaps it's because the committee was struck amidst the food bank closure and since we have our own program there is less urgency or organize. The Business rep has since taken on greater leadership in improving our program; I've been working on external sponsorship procurement.

#### **Build SFU:**

Fall included the September preparation for our Annual General Meeting to pass motions related to Build SFU. In short a great deal of my semester went towards promoting the AGM, contemplating whether I would support Build SFU within my personal life outside of Board and reading the legal contracts and redacted documents that would arrive following the yes vote. Beginning of semester outreach, our pancake breakfast and clubs day festivities went well as usual and all were focused on our Yes to Build SFU campaign. I wrote a long personal reflection advocating for a yes vote and would say that this year's board definitely secured more votes by ensuring concerns raised were addressed and by overall being very likeable people.

### **Administrative:**

I continue to organize staff and board milestone/birthday celebrations and appreciations, attend advocacy, students united for disability support, executive committee, strategic planning committee and board meetings, hold office hours in Burnaby and Vancouver and provide as much support as I can to the students that reach out for support. I also do the occasional Costco run for SFSS related cakes, outreach and office supplies In terms of addition to outreach related to advocacy, I did my best to ensure I gave time to promoting our open textbook campaign, our consultation survey, Build SFU and of course partook in all our usual SFSS beginning of semester outreach events.

#### **Conclusion:**

At the beginning of the fall semester I felt like I had a good start, I laid out a plan, set goals, but ultimately the things that unexpectedly came up, the campaigns that took over weren't really what I wanted to see, but if a project is deemed unfeasible one has to know when to

let go. I could have pursued a peer support program further or developed another consent campaign, but this would have meant potential duplication in efforts and would have caused other things to go unaddressed.

It was out of time constraints and sense of duty that I undertook a lot of these items, but also in recognition that these were things folks weren't already working on. If students or other orgs on campus are already taking on a consent campaign then why should the student society look to create their own? I've learned I do better when I have to work on something that no one else is doing, even if it's a board initiative, if there's another member wishes to take the lead then I tend to subconsciously take a step back, move to being a supporter and focus more attention on something else. I'm not really sure why I do this, but it's what I've realized upon writing this.

With the last 3 months ahead I'm looking forward wrapping up a few things, hosting a Men's Programming Initiative event, finding out what's going on with all of SFU's Student services as a result of all the complaints I've received this semester and over the last 3 years of my time at SFU, host some workshops and hopefully getting the SFSS to support a mandatory indigenous course. If I have time I would like to host a larger scale in person consultation with the membership, an idea that was sparked by my current POL 358 class on public engagement.