

AUGUST 2019

SUMMER SEMESTE REPORT

VP STUDENT LIFE

Jessica Nguyen
BBA Honours Candidate

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

My name is Jessica Nguyen and I am the 2019/2020 VP Student Life. This semester, I have been apart of the Events Committee, Nominating Committee, and the Fall Provincial and Municipal Lobbying (FPML) Committee.

Projects that I have spearheaded or supported on include but are not limited to FreezieFridays, Chill N Grill BBQ, Wellness Booth, Mental Health Packages, and Fall Kickoff Concert 2019. In addition, I have attended the Montreal StudentCare Trip, British Columbia Federations of Students Skills Symposium in Victoria, and University of British Columbia's Alpha Matta Societies Student Union Development. Moreover, I assisted Jasdeep (VP External) with the leadership of the Board of Directors as the Giovanni (Presidenti) was away on a co-op in Seattle. Together, we tried our best to ensure that all Board policies and procedures were being followed, and communicated what the Board was doing to Sylvia (Executive Director).

The past four months have been a wild adventure with a steep learning curve. Although I have been on the SFSS Board before, it is not the same at all this year. I am in a different role where I had made significant changes and the Board (ie. "team") is quite different than last year's. Furthermore, because of the new changes and lack of documentation of previous years, it has been a challenge to find a foundation to build off of.

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PROJECTS COMPLETED

Hiring Events Committee Members

I was as hands on with this project as I could be because I wanted to have a good team that I trusted and were well fit with the new changes to come for Events Committee. For the hiring part, I created roles and responsibilities for each position that I wanted for my Committee. I then asked Sindhu (Communications Coordinator) via work order to publish this onto the SFSS website. We had the posting for about a week and then we started the process of interviews because I wanted to expedite the process as fast as I could to have my team dive in Fall Kickoff planning as 4 months is not enough time.

During the interview process, I was away for the Montreal Studentcare trip but trusted my fellow colleagues, Andrew Wong and Maneet Aujla, to interview my team. I also created a generic set of questions to be asked by them and had them take thorough notes of the interviews. From there, I read over the notes and recommendations they left me. We briefly discussed and then rolled out acceptance letters.

One thing I would highly recommend is to be there for the interview process. It is hard to get a good read of people if you have to read it through someone else's notes. I do not think this was absolutely detrimental to my team but I think I could have made better choices if I was there during this time.

Furthermore, my current Internal Executive brought up a good point to ask specific questions to each role. So for example, a candidate for the Director of Marketing would have to explain a step by step marketing campaign they would create for a specific event. This will be the best indicator if they are equipped with the necessary skills for that position.

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Restructuring Events Committee

This is something that the previous VP Student Life tried to complete during his year. Because he lacked experience in this area, it was not executed properly. As I was able to recognize and identify the problem areas, I was able to fully implement a new structure this year.

The major development to the structure was creating job titles and responsibilities for each position in the Events Committee. I believe this was essential for success as it made it clearer to everyone what their role was supposed to be. After creating this, I hired people who had the specific skill set for a certain position or wanted to enhance and hone the skills for the respective position.

Is it perfect? Definitely not. This is only the very basic framework and so next year's VP Student Life should continue to try to adapt and make changes along the way. It is a huge improvement to the structure the Events Committee was using.

As I continue to adapt and change the structure as we go through the year, my final report will have a set of recommendations on what I think I could have done better.

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Freezie Fridays

This is an event that was spearheaded by the At Large Rep, Maneet Aujla. As she had experience being apart of the Events Committee, she was easily able to create a budget, briefing note, and obtain volunteers for the event.

For Freezie Fridays, an Events Committee street team went around campus giving out free freezies (and other various items ie. Canada Day flags, tattoos, and stickers). This event is good for the summer months because it is a low cost and easy to plan event while the team is overcoming the learning curve, getting to know one another, and planning for Fall Kickoff.

We were extremely unlucky in terms of weather both times we did this event. Somehow we managed to have the days leading up to Freezie Fridays have temperatures above +20 C with the sun shining beautifully but the day of the event, it would be cold and rainy. It was unfortunate timing for us but I do believe this event was well received by people.

When doing events like this, it is important to emphasize that the “Free” items are sponsored by the SFSS to help increase branding. Another note is that Giovanni (the President) really wanted to create branded Freezies that said “Tuition Freeze” on them. This is not something we did this time around but is a thought for the future. Also, for some reason, the rolling cooler handle is at an awkward length so you have to bend yourself lower to pull it around.

Lastly, I would recommend adding something else to the free freezie aspect. Some people do not like freezies so we did hand out themed cookies (it was the Friday before Canada Day) and that was very popular.

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Chill n Grill BBQ

This is an event that was mostly planned by the Events Director, Andrew Araneta, and Events coordinator, Dipti. This event pivoted several times and ended up collaborating with SFU's Outdoor Movie Night. Overall, it was a general hit to the event attendees as we ended up running out of supplies and were serving just the wieners of hot dogs after awhile.

The Events Committee team served BBQ items such as hamburgers, veggie burgers, hot dogs, an assortment of drinks, and various chip flavours. All items were \$1 each (ex. a hot dog, drink, and a bag of chips would be \$3) so it was heavily subsidized by the SFSS.

Some things that I would change if done again would be:

- Do not serve hamburgers unless the meat patties were already cooked (not raw)
- Order two grills instead of one to reduce wait times and pressure on the cooks
- Increase prices of hamburger and/or hot dogs to \$2
- Separate the event from SFU's Outdoor Movie Night because most attendees were not the SFSS membership (they were residents of Univercity)

Other things to note about this event:

- A week before the event, Andrew notified me that he can no longer attend the event and needed me to step in for leadership
- Ensure that you have available fridge/freezer spaces to put all the meats and veggie patties
- Have a minimum of two people do the grocery shopping as one person is not enough

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WELLNESS BOOTH

This event was something that was submitted by two new(er) Events Committee members, Ritu and Vidisha. Together, they planned to have a booth that provided some sweet treats to students the week before the exam period. The goal of this event was to help boost student morale during a stressful time and have some fun.

The event was submitted with a short runway time so it was a tiny bit stressful to get the table bookings from Facilities done. This event also ran in collaboration with another Event Committee's initiative called the Mental Health Packages.

For some reason, they wanted to provide cookies with lemonade which is a really weird combination. I suggest for future events that provide cookies, the drink that is offered should be a milk or an alternative for some milk. It was also brought to my attention during the event that we should have provided a vegan and a gluten free option to be more inclusive for the student membership.

Overall, it was well received by students who stopped by and students on social media. This is an easy event to plan and execute so I believe it should be something we do every semester.

MENTAL HEALTH PACKAGES

This is an initiative that was lead by an Events Committee member, Jennifer Chou. This is something she was incredibly passionate about and had on her campaign promises. The mental health packages consisted of various items including a refreshing eye mask, a stress ball in the shape of a heart, vegan and gluten free granola bar, a tea bag, several business cards that contained support/help lines on them and other resources, and many other tangible items.

Very last minute, this event collaborated with Pursuit of Happiness and they helped us table. I do believe that if this collaboration would have started earlier, we could have been stronger. This initiative does require more resources than other events but I believe it brings tremendous value as many students showed their appreciation for the packages we created by filling out a brief survey.

Two things that I think is important to look through is (1) how to be more environmentally friendly and (2) how to reduce costs. Because there are so many different things put in the bag, there is a lot of packaging that goes to waste in addition to all the paper items we provide. Since our team, and more specifically the Director of External Relations, has been so busy with Fall Kickoff, we were not able to re-allocate his time to support this event. I think in the future, we should be able to obtain a lot of sponsorships for this event. This is something I believe we will be doing again so I can give better recommendations as we continue to learn as we go.

PROJECTS IN PROGRESS

Fall Kickoff Concert 2019

Wow! Where to even begin with this... Fall Kickoff 2019 has been absolutely through the ringer. My team has been grappling with every single challenge that could possibly come our way.

I knew very well that this project required a lot of time because realistically, who can plan an entire +2000 person event that included alcohol in less than four months. I tried to hit the ground running before I was officially even VP Student Life. I think because I was semi-aware of the challenges that lay before me, it did minimize the hurdles that we did overcome.

The first major hurdle we ran into was venue. Because SFU's entire campus was and still is under construction, Convocation Mall was unavailable. This is where it was held every single year before me. I knew this was an issue so I completed my research and found a field named Field #2 (located behind the Terry Fox Field). This field has been used by other SFSS clubs for a festival like party and it had a bigger capacity so I thought it would be perfect for the Fall Kickoff 2019. So in mid-May, I had a meeting with Erin Biddlecomb (Student Services), Jessica Justa (MECs), and Mark Macloughlin (Director of Ancillary Services) to inform that I would like to bring Fall Kickoff back and this is the venue I was looking at.

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Before this meeting took place, I had requested Dipti to inquire about the field. She asked around and was eventually transferred to the Student Athletics and Recreation Department and was told that they were interested for us to have the event there but the capacity could only be 250 people. This was a complete joke as Convocation Mall's capacity is well over 2000 people but it was almost $\frac{1}{4}$ the size of Field #2. After some debates, they told us that the capacity then would be 2500 which was much more reasonable.

So the day of the first meeting with SFU for Fall Kickoff roles around and I give them a pitch of everything but more specifically, the venue. The consensus from the meeting is that SFU supported me and the SFSS to having Fall Kickoff and the venue was not flagged as a bad idea. A couple weeks later, I tried to get written confirmation from SFU that I could have the official go ahead for this venue and start planning other things (ie. production company, talent, fencing, etc). I did not receive a response. Mid-june rolls around and Sylvia (SFSS Executive Director) has a meeting with Erin where she briefly brings up Fall Kickoff. It was alarming when Erin told Sylvia that there was no go ahead because the venue is not okay for Fall Kickoff but this was not communicated to me at all.

You would think this would be the only kerfuffle with venue but it gets much worse. As time passes and with a huge SFU delay, SFU then pitches to us Field #4 would be a much better option and they are willing to approve it. At the same time, I had my appendix erupt so I was in the hospital and unable to work so Mohnish (Internal Executive) had to take over. So at this point we were working under the premise that we had Field #4. I was absent for about a week and while I was gone, I received an email (written) confirmation from Erin that SFU's VP Finance and VP Provost had approved Field #4 so I forwarded this email to my team and we celebrated. When I came back from surgery, the first Monday we had a meeting with SFU.

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At this meeting, the Safety and Risk Services (SRS) Department informed us that Field #4 had significant safety issues that could not be mitigated. This meant that we could not use Field #4 and the written confirmation we received from Erin became nothing.

This was becoming increasingly frustrating for the team because if we could not secure a venue, we could not have Fall Kickoff. We could not start other tasks such as hiring a production company, obtaining external sponsors, start marketing, etc until we secure the venue. This delay gave us an increasingly alarming short runaway as we now had less than 3 months to go and no venue.

With some major trust issues, SFU proposed to us to have it in the place they always wanted us to have Fall Kickoff: Strand Hall. Because of the complications they created for us, I was able to negotiate for them to sponsor the usual \$10K and have them pay a difference of tickets (150 people) because Strand Hall has a smaller capacity size. Now it was becoming the end of June and SFU finally gave us the go ahead with Fall Kickoff on SFU Burnaby at Strand Hall.

While confirming the venue was in the process, I was working in the background to research production companies. At this time, there were only two major production companies: Blueprint (BP) and Crescendo1 (C1). In past years, we had always worked with BP but there were a series of complaints with their behavior.

Upon my meeting with the BP Rep for SFU, Justin Pandos, I can see why there were complaints. He was extremely unprofessional and showed up late to the meeting. In addition, he had no presentation set up and was condescending to me. Sylvia (the ED) also said that she would strongly recommend me look for someone else because he could not answer any of her questions about event planning and seemed disorganized.

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Because of this awful experience, I contacted C1 to see if they would be a better company to work with. Unbeknownst to me, the previous VP Student Life (VPSL), did not end on good terms with the company. The backstory was the the previous VPSL had made it seem like we were going to use and pay for C1's services so C1 worked for us for a month. What ended up happening was SFU did not allow SFSS and the VPSL at that time to host Fall Kickoff that year so everything was essentially cancelled including the working agreement with C1. This meant that all C1's work for a month was done for nothing and they were not paid for their services. Even with this happening with C1, the owner Johnny Black, was understanding when I apologized about what happened last year and was interested in working with them. We then scheduled a meeting and it went exponentially better than the one with BP.

After sending both companies a list of questions to answer, I received the best and timely response from Johnny so I decided to go with C1. Everything has been okay. I truly believe this experience would have been much better than going with BP. The only issue with C1 is that it is a smaller company than BP and so there are some delays as the team is smaller.

Furthermore, because this is the first time we are working together, we are straightening out what is the best way to work with each other. Johnny and I both agree that C1 should create a line up and give up 4-6 versions of one and then have the team decide. This would streamline the process of choosing the talent and make it easier for both parties. We did not know this the first time so it created a lot of issues.

In comparison to BP, Johnny is respectful and does not talk down to the team or me. You also save student dollars because C1 is a cheaper than BP. It is hard to do a thorough comparison because we had big challenges to overcome this year that have not been issues in years past.

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I would recommend the next VPSL to give C1 another chance and try to work with them again next year. It is critical to have a timeline with soft and hard deadlines that was created with C1 to have no communication problems and a clear set of expectations from both parties. With more time (start planning in May), there would be less complications.

We are 20 days away from Fall Kickoff 2019 and so read my next report to see what

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CONCLUSION

Overall, this semester has been so crazy. To quote myself, I stated that “this year is gonna be a wild ride” and it has lived to this. It was an incredibly hectic four months because numerous factors but heavily because of the split board, my appendix bursting during midterm season, and Fall Kickoff. These were all things completely out of my control so I just had to try to go with the flow and do my best.

I think there are two major things for success for the VPSL. The first is hiring a good team to work through some huge pain points with. You do not want a team with a lot of conflicts because that creates problems on top of problems. The second is to start planning Fall Kickoff 2019 as soon as possible and not do too many events during the summer semester. All resources should be spent on Fall Kickoff because it is a heavy project.

Lastly, make sure you take care of yourself. I always stress this because it is so easy to lose yourself during this busy time and enter into the loss burnout cycle. If you ever have any questions or concerns, feel free to shoot me an email (xjessicanguyenn@gmail.com) because I really understand what you are going through and experiencing.