

Semester Report: Fall 2019
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Table of Contents

Executive Summary 3

Completed Projects4

 Project 14

 Project 24

 Project 35

Projects in Progress 6

 Project 16

 Project 26

 Project 37

 Project 47

Pain Points 8

Recommendations 9

Executive Summary

My name is Osob Mohamed, and I am the Faculty representative for Health Sciences for the 2019/2020 Board year. Currently, I sit on the University and Academic Affairs (UAA), Governance and Surrey Campus (SCC) committees.

In my second term as a Board member, I've developed a better sense of my role and duties as a Board member, and the responsibilities I've chosen to take on as an elected representative of the Society. I am pleased with the direction that this Board is moving in in some regards, such as our vocal support of the TSSU "Research is Work" campaign, and the development of issues policies to protect and cement our stances when it comes to the issues that impact our students directly. I've had the pleasure of working on a number of initiatives, such as increasing the distribution and availability of Open Educational Resources (OERs), developing and implementing policy to protect reproductive rights on campus, and facilitating the approval and upcoming hiring of a new Student Advocate, amongst other projects I will speak on more.

On the other hand, I think our Board has a fundamental misunderstanding of the differences between a typical non-profit, and a student society. In the inherently political environment that we work in and participate in every day (for instance, other non-profits do not have elections!), we need to recognize that dissent should be welcomed and "Board solidarity" does not apply when it comes to holding directors accountable for their individual decisions.

I am looking forward to the spring semester, which will be my final term on the Board and my chance to finish up some of my current projects and begin some new ones for the next Board to hopefully carry out.

Completed Projects

Project 1

Reproductive Rights

During the Summer semester, I began the process of the development of Issues policies for the Society, which would clearly outline where the Society stands on various issues pertaining to undergraduate student life. The first of which was the Reproductive Rights policy, which would clarify our pro-choice stance, in light of student concern around anti-choice clubs being funded by the SFSS.

During the course of this project, I had consulted Sarah (Campaigns, Policy and Research Coordinator) who has been immensely helpful in the drafting of this document. I have also consulted with Paola from the Women's Centre, as she has been a great source of information on how we can make this policy as clear and comprehensive as possible. I have also had a chance to work with Ashley from Out on Campus, to ensure that we kept in mind that it isn't only women who need to have their reproductive rights protected, and our language and actions should reflect this knowledge.

We were able to receive legal consultation regarding the language used in the policy, to ensure it would be both fair and robust.

Outcome

The IP 1: Reproductive Rights was passed at the Board table in December 2019. As of right now, SFU Lifeline is no longer recognized by the SFSS as an SFSS Club, and will no longer be eligible to receive monetary, space or staff resources. This policy will be a guiding document if a similar issue is to arise in the future.

Project 2

Menstrual Products Initiative

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With the GSS, we had decided to take on the project of providing free menstrual products to students all over campus. We submitted a proposal with the Student Experience Initiative, which is a program funded by SFU solely for the purpose of improving the lives of students on campus. Ideally, by providing menstrual products all over campus, we would be able to alleviate some of the financial burden associated with menstruation, but mostly to help students who may need a pad or tampon urgently.

Outcomes

The Student Experience initiative has approved our request, and a pilot project to distribute free menstrual supplies throughout the Burnaby campus will begin in the near future. We will assess the effectiveness of our intervention, and continue to lobby for permanent free menstrual supplies from SFU and the government.

Project 3

Voting Records

A topic that has come up at the very beginning of the Board term was the quality and consistency of the minutes we post to the SFSS website. As of right now, our minutes neither list how the Board members vote, nor provide much context for people who are unable to attend our meetings but want to stay updated on the affairs of the society.

I wrote up a briefing note during the Summer semester, listing some options that we could potentially adopt. In January, I updated my briefing note with context and information I had gathered between Summer semester and January, and brought it back to Governance Committee to which it was initially referred.

Outcomes

The Governance committee has recommended that the Board implement a Ratio Vote system, where all votes are recorded as a ratio of in favour votes to opposed to abstentions. While I do not feel this is adequate, it is a step in the right direction to provide a more thorough picture as to how a decision was made when a student chooses to read through our minutes

Projects in Progress

Project 1

Open Educational Resources & Open Access Week

Along with Shina (VP University Relations), I began to look into how the SFSS can lend a voice to the Open Educational Resource (OER) movement. Through working with the SFU OER Working Group and having the chance to attend the OpenEd19 conference to learn from the professionals in the field, I've developed a much more thorough of what open access material means, and what work has been done and still needs to be done to make educational materials as financially accessible to students as possible. This includes incentivizing instructors to create their own course material, use already created open source material, and stop making costly services such as iClickers and access codes mandatory.

Outcomes

Through the University and Academic Affairs (UAA) Committee and the OER Working groups, I have been working alongside Shina to host some potential events for Open Access Week in March, including a potential panel and hosting a medium through which students can sign pledge cards and become a direct stakeholder in this initiative.

Project 2

Associate Vice-President Students & International Search Committee

I am currently sitting on the search committee for the next Associate Vice-President

Students & International (AVPSI) for SFU, as the SFSS representative. My job is to ensure that undergraduate priorities are adequately considered in the development of a job description and the hiring for this position.

Considering that the AVPSI is a critical decision maker regarding the affairs of students and particularly international students, I will ensure that I am diligent in making sure that the student perspective is both heard and prioritized. I will continue to sit on this committee even past the completion of my Board term.

Project 3

Issues Policies

Following the implementation of IP 1: Reproductive Rights, I have brought the development of further issues policies to the Governance Committee for implementation and review. For instance, in the 2015 Policy Manual of the SFSS, we had some Issues policies that can be reworked and re-implemented. Other Student Societies and Student Unions across Canada have very robust and thorough Issues Policies that we can use to guide the implementation of our own that will be relevant to the SFSS.

Outcomes

I will review with the Governance Committee the old Issues policies that I believe should be recommended to the Board to re-implement. I would also like to conduct a survey or add questions onto the General Membership Survey this year, so that the next Board has some guidelines regarding what kind of issues are important and relevant to students in 2020.

Project 4

Student Advocate

Over the course of the Summer semester, Shina (VP University Relations) and I collected information on how different student unions in our area provide one-on-one support to

their students through a student advocate position. We met with staff from the GSS, BCITSA and AMS, learned more about their jobs and how they've impacted students thus far through the work that they do. We brought our proposal to the Board during the fall semester, and the project was approved by the Board of Directors.

Outcomes

Currently, I am working on creating some recommendations for the qualifications and experience we would like to see in our incoming Student Advocate, which will allow our Executive Director to create a job description with our suggestions implemented. I will base my recommendations on both student feedback, and the meetings we conducted with student advocacy offices across the Lower Mainland.

Pain Points

One of the main pain points I have faced during the Fall semester has been seeing such a distinct divide between the decisions being made at the Board table, and the wants and needs expressed by the student body. For instance, an entire campaign set up by students called Save our Spaces emerged in response to the Board rejecting the call for permanent space to be allocated to the Rotunda groups. When we are elected to represent the student body and then outright ignore the students who urge us to reconsider, we are doing our jobs completely wrong. I hope that we can learn from this experience, and not repeat it as the students currently urge us to complete and audit to figure out why we lost such an exorbitantly unacceptable amount of money during Fall Kickoff.

Another pain point has been adjusting to taking more classes than I normally do, while working on SFSS initiatives. I feel that I could have done more work, and during the Spring semester, I will work harder to prove to the student body that I was indeed the right person for this job. I have been incredibly disappointed to see the decrease in work from some Board members, but I will continue to encourage my fellow Board members to do their best, and

remember why we requested the student body to allow us to take on the responsibility of guiding the Society.

Recommendations

To the next Health Sciences representative, I hope that you can take the initiative to learn how to make changes within the Society, as you have been given a unique opportunity to provide students with resources, spaces and the care to allow them to enjoy their university experience to the fullest. Remember, this experience is not about your own personal agenda, but rather to improve the quality of life for all students, and beginning by centering the voiced of marginalized students in your work. Be an advocate and an activist in your role, as I truly believe that SFU's radical roots can be replanted into a student movement that cannot be stopped.

Take the time to take care of yourself and create a good work-school-life balance, and remember that this is not your typical job. You were elected by students and entrusted with resources and decision making, and it is not a privilege to be taken lightly. Lastly, go be part of your community! Engage with students one on one. Invite them into the office to study, hang out and air their grievances. Be a part of the community, it will help you guide your decision making process.

It's a great position. Good luck!