

# VP UNIVERSITY RELATIONS EXIT REPORT 2019/2020

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**simon fraser**  
**student society**

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# SERVING AS VICE- PRESIDENT UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

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The role of the Vice-President of University Relations is to serve as an active board member and represent the Simon Fraser Student Society to the University. The SFSS vision is to see students thriving everywhere, and every project I took on this year helped further that vision. This report will serve as highlights of my prominent year as VP University Relations, recommendations for the incoming director, and closing remarks on my experience.

The 2019-2020 year, I had the pleasure of reestablishing the Joint Operations Group with SFSS, GSS, and SFU representation for monthly meetings. In addition to starting the Student Safety Group with representation from various SFU services. I also engaged with the SFU President and VP Students and International in monthly meetings with the SFSS President and GSS External Relations representative. These multi-faceted meetings with the university administration strengthened the relationship between the SFSS and SFU. Through this positive relationship, we were able to save international students \$165,000 in potential tuition increases for the 2020/21 year. We facilitated constructive dialogue about budget consultations, student affordability, and student safety to be at the forefront of this year.

I was fortunate to serve on SFSS committees, such as Vancouver Campus Committee (VCC), and the Finance and Audit Committee (FAC), in addition to, chairing the University and Academic Affairs Committee (UAA). The work done at the Vancouver campus through VCC showed consistency from the SFSS to serve our multi-campus membership. Chairing the UAA committee has been immensely rewarding, the committee has managed to complete 8 projects such as the Federal Election Debate and the Gondola Open House. There are 4 currently ongoing for the next VP UR to continue on, included Open Education Resources advocacy and the Student Affordability Plan.

The year has ended with academic advocacy for students due to COVID-19. I launched the conversations for a pass/fail options for final grades with the SFU VP Academic and Provost, and through further collaboration with student senators, we were able to secure this option for students and more this year.

The rest of the report will elaborate on the 5 priorities listed to the right.

## 2019/20 PRIORITIES



DIALOGUE WITH  
ADMINISTRATION



ACADEMIC ADVOCACY



BURNABY MOUNTAIN  
GONDOLA CAMPAIGN



STUDENT CHAMPION



STUDENT FINANCIAL  
HEALTH

# DIALOGUE WITH ADMINISTRATION

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## Joint Operations Group

This committee was restarted after a 3-year gap including representation from the SFSS, GSS, and SFU. I had the pleasure of chairing the majority of these monthly meetings, and we discussed issues ranging from the international student health fee to controversial events planning and the Transit strike impacts on the SFU community. The membership on this group includes the SFSS President, VP UR, Executive Director, GSS External Relations, Academic Relations, Executive Director, SFU Vice-President of Finance and Administration, Vice-Provost, Students and International, Dean of Graduate studies, Executive Director of Student Affairs, Registrar and Executive Director, Senior Director of the Office of the Provost, and finally the SFU Secretary office of the Provost, Students, and International. All parties can also invite guests to discuss any agenda items as needed. This is the platform to use for any high-level discussions with the university administration that involve residence, finances, events, and more.

## Monthly President Meetings

I was fortunate to be involved in the monthly meetings with the SFU President and the Vice Provost, Students and International alongside the SFSS President and the GSS External Relations. These meetings were our chance to share student concerns as well as the projects the SFSS is working on to address those concerns. This was a platform to share undergraduate and graduate student concerns and engage in dialogue with the most influential members of the SFU administration.



President Andrew Petter, myself, and the GSS External Relations, Matt McDonald at the Annual SFU Diwali Gala

## Vice-Provost and Academic Search Committee

I am currently representing the SFU undergraduate students on the Vice-Provost and Academic search committee. Alongside GSS representative, Matt McDonald, we serve as the students and the voice with deans, professors, and staff to hire the incoming VPA for a 5-year contract. The format after COVID-19 is Zoom meetings and my role is to be prepared and honest when evaluating potential candidates for this vital position.

# DIALOGUE WITH ADMINISTRATION

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## **Budget Consultation Feedback**

The feedback process for the budget involves a powerpoint presentation to students on the three campuses explaining the changes to the budget and how much tuition is going to be raised. The term 'consultation' was not appropriate to label these presentations and the SFSS President, myself, and the GSS External Relations pushed for SFU to involve students in the consultation process earlier. The feedback letter included areas of tuition hikes and calling for a tuition freeze in addition to working with the university to lobby the government for increased funding. This feedback process was also the foundation for the Student Affordability Plan.

## **Critical Incident Review Committee**

Following the October 3, 2018 incident on Burnaby campus, the Vice Provost Students and International at that time struck a working group to evaluate SFU's response and liaise with a consulting agency to discover how we can do better for the future. I was fortunate to be part of the working group in addition to the Vice Provost, Students and International, Senior Director of the Office of the Provost, Chief Safety Officer of Campus Public Safety, Senior Director of Campus Public Safety, and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Together, the committee was able to synthesize the recommendations by the consulting firm and present the changes to the SFU administration.

## **Student Safety Group**

This group was created during my year and it started as a conversation with the SFU Chief Safety Officer and became a group with over 15 SFU services that meets once a semester. The idea behind this was to address problems before they become issues, stemming from the concerns of student safety over the 2018-2019 school year. The committee has membership from the SFSS President, VP UR, Executive Director, GSS External Relations, Executive Director, SFU Safety and Risk services, Residence and Housing, SFU Surrey, SFU Vancouver, SFSS Women's Center, and Out on Campus, SFU Facilities, Sexual Violence and Prevention Office, Fraser International College, Student Conduct Office, and University Communications. Since this meeting is only once a semester, the agenda is quite lengthy and has included discussions surrounding extreme weather, COVID-19, emergency situations and how the university responds online, and more. This is the perfect platform to share the student perspective at one time with the folks doing the majority of the ground work on campus.



# ACADEMIC ADVOCACY

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Health Science Representative Osob Mohamed and I at BCIT and UBC visiting their student advocates

## Student Advocacy Office

This was a project taken on by myself and the Health Science representative, Osob Mohamed based on campaign commitment. Over the summer, we had preliminary meetings with the BCIT Student Association Student Advocates and the UBC AMS Student Advocate to learn about the position and whether it would be a fit for SFU students. Realizing this would be a wonderful addition to the SFSS, we worked with the Executive Director and got the UAA committee's recommendation to hire a student advocate. After board approval, the position was added into the budget for the 2020/21 fiscal year and the hiring process will begin in summer 2020. The student advocate would handle things such as non-academic appeals, academic misconduct, housing appeals, and parking disputes.

## Climate Strike Email Campaign

The climate strike in September of 2019 was put on by environmental activists across the globe and SFSS board members came together to attend, equipped with posters and songs to add to the strike. To promote student participation, I sent an email to the SFU President, VP Academic and Provost, and VP Students and International encouraging them to grant academic amnesty to students who would like to attend the strike. This was part of a larger SFSS email campaign to all the deans and department heads of SFU to encourage all faculty to grant academic amnesty and stand in solidarity with the millions around the world fighting for climate justice.

## COVID-19 Pass/Fail Grading Options

The end of the board year we were faced with a global pandemic that left students uncertain about their final grades. To address this, I wrote an email to the VP Academic and Provost and VP Students and International to facilitate the discussion for pass/fail options for final grades. Through continued collaborations with student senators, we secured the pass/fail option for students to finish off the spring 2020 semester. We continue to advocate for exam fairness by preventing the mandatory usage of webcams due to accessibility issues.



SFSS President, Giovanni HoSang, myself, and VP Finance Tawanda Chitapi at the Climate Strike

# ACADEMIC ADVOCACY

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Osob and I with the students of the 16th  
Annual Open Education Conference

## **16th Annual Open Education Conference**

I had the pleasure of attending the 16th Annual Open Education conference with Osob Mohamed in Phoenix, Arizona. We were able to meet wonderful students, staff, faculty, and publishers from the United States and Canada who are deeply immersed in the world of Open Education. Through this conference, we learned about how other institutions have been raising awareness for this important issue and what tactics they are using to get their administration and student body on board. This also led to us meeting the CEO of BC Campus and coming back to share potential collaboration ideas with the SFU OER working group.

## **SFU Open Education Resources (OER) Working Group Collaboration**

After attending the conference, Osob and I were eager to get involved on campus and connected with Hope Powers, the chair of the SFU OER working group. She filled us in on the multitude of projects ongoing and was excited to have active student participation on the working group. We brainstormed ideas for hosting a panel event, got group feedback on the letter to the deans campaign, and gathered participation for the OER awareness video. I was fortunate to be asked to participate in the Canadian Resources for Academic Materials Panel by Imelda May, the Bookstore Manager, to share my experience as a student with the potential benefits of OER projects and the importance of open education as a whole.

## **OER Campaign Video**

The Education Representative, Emerly Liu had an idea to create an OER awareness video to share with the SFU community, including facts about OER, current projects, and what students can do to help. We gathered student participation at the Burnaby campus as well as members of the OER working group and through the support of the SFSS Communications office, we were able to finalize the video. However, due to COVID-19, we were unable to launch, so it will be part of the University and Academic Affairs 2020/21 Committee plan.

## **OER Faculty Letter**

At-large Representative, Rayhaan Khan and I worked together to draft a letter for the SFSS faculty representatives to distribute to their respective deans regarding the importance of OER and how it can benefit students and faculty. The letter is completed, however, due to COVID-19, we were unable to launch the campaign. This is more OER related advocacy that will be part of the UAA 2020/21 year plan.

# BURNABY MOUNTAIN GONDOLA CAMPAIGN

## Attended Burnaby Council Meeting

In May, I was present at the Burnaby City Council meeting to show student and SFSS support for the Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project. Alongside co-founder of Build the SFU Gondola, Colin Fowler, the SFSS President and I were present when the project was approved in principle. We were also able to connect with the SFU Vice-President External Relations, Joanne Curry, to collaborate on future projects related to gondola advocacy.

## Collaboration with SFU VP External Office

Throughout the year, I have been fortunate to have SFU's immense support on gondola advocacy. In particular, Nav Sangera and Jim Rutkowski would keep me updated on the timeline of the project on Translink's side as well as SFU's side. They also requested student feedback on the SFU Gondola campaign which was set to launch in March of 2020, however it was unfortunately delayed due to COVID-19. SFU's help has been monumental in staying updated on the project as a whole and I am excited to see where this will go!

## Burnaby Now Op-Ed

To further advocate the advantages of the gondola, I wrote an opinion piece for Burnaby Now from the perspective of an SFU student. Support from Jim and Colin's editing helped publish the piece and push the advocacy to the general public as well as the SFU community. The Op-Ed is a lengthier reflection of the benefits of the gondola and the positive impacts it can have on the Burnaby Mountain community.

## Hosted Gondola Open House

Through UAA Committee support, I was able to successfully host a 2-day Open House for the SFU community to educate folks on the current position of the gondola. We had large visuals of the 3 route options currently being considered by Translink on display in addition to a large feedback board for folks to write comments. The Campaigns, Research, and Policy Coordinator, Sarah Edmunds, was able to synthesize the 700+ people open house into a report that I have delivered to SFU External office and Translink's office.



UAA Committee members hosting the first Gondola Open House

# STUDENT CHAMPION

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FCAT Representative Fiona Li and myself  
at the Vancouver Winter Warm-Up

## Engagement at Woodward's

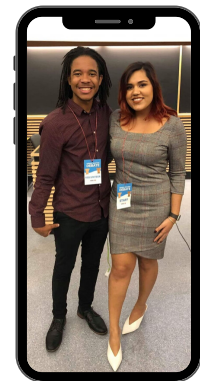
As part of the Vancouver Campus Committee, I created opportunities to engage with the students at the Vancouver campus and be involved in the SFU events held at Harbor Center. Working with Fiona Li as the chair of VCC, she connected us with SFU Student Services staff to better understand the demographics of the Vancouver campus and how to reach a wider network of students.

## SFSS x SEI

The SFU Student Experience Initiative worked with the the FCAT Representative, Fiona Li, FASS Representative, Jennifer Chou, and myself on a project to enhance a particular part of the student experience. Based on SFSS survey data about inaccessible event posters, we thought about restructuring the cork boards to make them easier to read. We worked with SFU facilities to create a template (on campus events, off-campus events, free-food etc.) for all the boards at the Burnaby campus, as well as plans to replace the old cork boards. The project was supposed to be finished in March, however due to COVID-19 we weren't able to launch. Jennifer will continue the project during her year as incoming VP Student Life!

## Federal Election Debate

During our board year, there happened to be a Federal Election and we were fortunate to co-host a debate with the Graduate Student Society. We had candidates from the three major parties (Liberal, NDP, and Green) representing the Burnaby North-Seymour riding. The event had over 300 SFU community members in attendance and we hosted an engaging Q&A session at the end of the event, facilitating political engagement on campus.



President, Giovanni HoSang and I co-  
hosting the Federal Election Debate

## Sexual Assault Awareness Month with Women's Center

During the month of January, the UAA committee co-sponsored a Pancake Breakfast in conjunction with the Women's Center to raise awareness and understanding about sexual assault and what we can do to prevent it.



# STUDENT CHAMPION

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## **SFSS Communications Working Group**

I wanted to strengthen our branding and communicate the highlights of the society online so we created this working group. We hired a digital media assistant to focus only on the SFSS Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter pages and create one consistent voice for the SFSS. The comprehensive social media strategy tackles the different audiences that follow the SFSS on social media. We also worked on simplifying communication for the various clubs and DSU's and providing opportunities to connect with the SFSS board members through town halls.

## **#BoardMemberMondays**

This was a social media campaign, spearheaded by myself and the Faculty of Applied Science representative, Nick Chubb, and accomplished by support from the SFSS communications office. We posted introductory information about all 16 board members including information such as pet peeves and favorite places to spend time with loved ones. We shared this content on Instagram to make the board members more personable and approachable throughout their board year and have consistent, scheduled content for 16 weeks.

## **Board Town Hall**

I had an idea to recap the year as well as give students a behind the scenes peak of the experiences of board members. Through support from Dipti Chavan, the Events Coordinator, we were able to pull together this event and host it during the final days of nomination period. The event was an opportunity for potential candidates to learn about the role of a board member, as well as ask the current board questions. This event held annually can become a tradition used to to inform students about SFSS before they decide to declare their candidacy. It also gave the SFSS staff based in Surrey an overview of the board accomplishments.

## **TransMountain Pipeline Awareness Event with SFU350**

A student from SFU350 reached out to me to collaborate on a TransMountain Pipeline Awareness event to educate the SFU community on the pipeline impacts and concerns. I brought this idea to UAA and we provided funding for this event held in early March. The Burnaby Fire Chief, SFU Chief Safety Officer, and an independent activist from the Musqueam people were speakers at the event. Burnaby Mayor Mike Hurley and the MLA for Burnaby-Lougheed, Katrina Chen, were in attendance, in addition to 40 community members.

# STUDENT CHAMPION

## SFU Lennon Wall

During the time of the Hong Kong protests for banning the extradition bill, SFU students wanted to stand in solidarity with the protesters and create a Lennon Wall outside the SFSS offices. I spearheaded this project to provide rolling boards that could be used as a wall, filled with encouraging messages to the residents of Hong Kong who were fighting for freedom. Working with the Executive Director, Sylvia Ceacero, we addressed concerns from the tenants of MBC, Campus Public Safety, and Student Services and provided the wall for 2 months. We also put out a statement supporting the right to protest without fear of vandalism.



SFSS Lennon Wall 2019



SFSS Board Members at Welcome  
Day 2019 and the Annual  
Pancake Breakfast

## SFSS x SFU Week of Welcome

The SFSS board worked with SFU Student Services to have presence at SFU's biggest event for first-year students - Welcome Day. We provided support through volunteers, hand-washing stations, and handing out mini-donuts and cotton candy. The successful event had over 2000 first year students in attendance, we also sold Fall Kickoff tickets to promote our biggest event of the year. The week continued with a Pancake Breakfast sponsored by the SFSS to build relationships with students and make a great first impression!

# STUDENT FINANCIAL HEALTH

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## **Student Affordability Plan**

After the tuition hikes of up to 20% in the 2018/19 academic year, we worked with the GSS External Representative extensively to create a Student Affordability Plan (SAP) for SFU. We had dialogue with the VP Finance, President, and others about centering affordability in all SFU projects. The SAP is now a collaborative working group with SFU, SFSS, and GSS representation figuring out how to mobilize conversations around tangible (textbooks, housing, food, tuition etc.) and intangible (policies and procedures) cost perspectives. The working group will have their first meeting in summer 2020, and get started on this strategic plan to center affordability in the framework of SFU.

## **Menstrual Products Initiative**

This initiative followed in the footsteps of the New Westminster School System to provide free menstrual products in high traffic washrooms on all three campuses. Collaborating with the GSS, Women's Center, and Out on Campus, we submitted a proposal to the Student Experience Initiative (SEI) to fund this as a pilot project. The proposal was approved and a Research Assistant was hired on the project to see it through. After partnering with a US based company, this project was meant to begin implementation in spring 2020. However, due to COVID-19, and classes being shifted to online for summer 2020, SEI is rethinking the timeline of this initiative to a later start date.

## **SFU Shuttle Service**

The free shuttle service from Residence, to Cornerstone, to FIC was threatened to cancel in August, 2019. However, after speaking to students, staff, and faculty about the importance of the service, I engaged in dialogue with the Director of Parking Services and shared the online petition started by students in residence. Through continuous advocacy, an email campaign to parking services, and the online petition we secured the free shuttle service until August 2020! There is now a live tracker for the bus, an app, two additional stops, and overwhelmingly positive support from the SFU community for the free shuttle service.

# STUDENT FINANCIAL HEALTH

## Car2Go on campus

I had a student address the lack of Car2Go on campus and requested for me to research whether this would be possible at SFU. After meeting with the Director of Parking Services and explaining the cost benefits of having this service available to students, he helped me set up a meeting with Car2Go. Unfortunately, Car2Go was going through a company merger at the same time of our request and they were unable to provide the support required to set up SFU stations, but they will keep us updated if things change.

## COVID-19 SFSS Response

This year has ended with a global pandemic and left the world with uncertainty towards the new normal. Students were hit hard while going through final exam stress and trying to deal with the stress of this virus. Working with the SFSS President, I wrote an email to the VP Academic and Provost and the Vice Provost of Students and International to consider pass/fail grading options for spring 2020 final grades. Through collaboration with the student senators, we were successful in securing this grading option for all SFU students and helped ease the stress of final exams. Also, through the advocacy of FASS representative, Jennifer, the SFSS board collectively decided to establish a \$150,000 bursary for students impacted by COVID-19. We passed a motion to contribute \$60,000 to FIC students as well who are in a precarious financial situation due to COVID-19.

simon fraser  
student society

## MONTH IN REVIEW - MARCH



The SFSS response to COVID-19

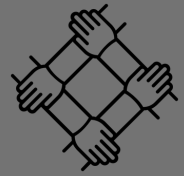


# FINAL THOUGHTS

1. **Collaborate!** The year was more successful and rewarding when I collaborated with other board members and SFU services on projects. This establishes relationships between the SFSS and the multiple SFU services that exist. However, make sure the amount of leads in one project is manageable to ensure the project is moving forward in a timely manner.
2. **Don't be afraid to ask questions.** If you are confused around a certain topic at a board or committee meeting, you are likely not the only one. Help your fellow board members and make sure folks are making informed decisions when voting.
3. **Plan projects through UAA committee.** The support from the committee is immense, from the board members to the at-large students. It allows for better ideas to flow and to consider something one person might have missed. I have also prepared a report for the UAA committee year-end with more details.
4. **Respectful Dialogue is key.** The meetings with university administration are a prominent part of this role and respectful dialogue will help you to help students. Do your best to find the balance between pushing the university on the changes they need to make and appreciating the work they do. A negative relationship with the administration leads to decreased willingness to adhere to the advocacy attempts by the SFSS.
5. **Self-Care is monumental to be successful.** This role is the most challenging task I have taken on during my time at SFU. It has made me question core aspects of myself and I have come out stronger at the end of year. However, without my self-care routine and considerable support from my loved ones, I would not have made it through this year on a positive note. Take the time you need when the role isn't going the way you expect, which will happen throughout your year.

**THANK YOU for the honor of letting me serve as your Vice-President of University Relations!**

## RECOMMENDATIONS



COLLABORATE!



DON'T BE AFRAID TO  
ASK QUESTIONS



PLAN PROJECTS  
THROUGH UAA  
COMMITTEE



RESPECTFUL DIALOGUE  
IS KEY



SELF-CARE IS  
MONUMENTAL