

2018
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2020

VP EXTERNAL RELATIONS EXIT REPORT

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ABOUT THE SIMON FRASER STUDENT SOCIETY

The Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) is a student-led organization that represents and advocates for the interests of the 25,000+ undergraduate students at SFU. The SFSS is a non-profit organization that provides services and support to improve the student experience.

The SFSS is governed by a student-elected Board of Directors that is elected every spring semester. The Board is advised by Council, a body representing every faculty and departmental student union across all three SFU campuses. In addition to Board and Council, the organization is serviced by a staff of over 30 permanent and student staff members who assist with front-line services and behind-the-scenes support.

The SFSS provides a range of services and activities for the benefit of undergraduate students at SFU. Some examples include: bookable student-centric spaces, equipment rentals, an extended health and dental plan, the U-Pass BC Program, a free legal clinic, an emergency food bank program, and grants for clubs and student unions.



VISION AND MISSION

The vision of the organization is to ensure students are thriving everywhere. This vision is supported by the mission that aims to help students reach their full potential by providing resources and services that represent, connect and benefit the membership.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Student Engagement; Student Wellbeing; Student Financial Health; University Relations; Government and Stakeholder Relations; Organizational Development

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Enhance students' experience; Growth in students' financial resources; Increase students' engagement and sense of belonging; Successful SFSS advocacy campaigns; Streamline and improve governance and operations

INTRODUCTION

This report is meant to serve as a snapshot of my experience in the role of the Vice President of External Relations for the past two terms. My hope is that the information found in this report can be used as a resource for my successors and any student that may be interested in getting involved with the SFSS. I have shared some of the highlights of my time on the Board, recommendations to the incoming Vice President of External Relations, and closing remarks on my overall experience. For the sake of brevity, this report only includes highlights of the projects and initiatives I was involved in. If you are interested in learning more about any of the projects I have mentioned in this report, you may reach out to my successors for internal reports and records.

Serving on the SFSS Board can be a unique experience for each Board member. The role of the Vice President of External Relations carries the same portfolio year to year, but the person serving in this role ultimately determines their own experience and priorities. Some of the highlights and accomplishments I have mentioned in this report do not directly fall under my portfolio and that is largely due to the fluid nature of Board roles. Although all 16 positions on the Board have a distinct list of duties and responsibilities, there are countless opportunities to set aside titles and lend a helping hand to fellow Board members. My proudest moments on the Board have been the ones that I have shared with my colleagues, and the ones where the Board has overcome personal differences to serve our membership. I encourage my successors to focus on excelling in their individual roles, but not to forget that the Board is most effective when it is united and serving as a team.



SERVING AS THE VICE PRESIDENT OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The role of the Vice President of External Relations before anything else is to serve as an effective Board member for the organization. Although there is a list of portfolio specific duties and responsibilities, those are insignificant in comparison to the primary duties of a Board member. A Board member is elected to govern the society and make informed decisions that are in the best interest of the organization. Some of these decisions include:

- developing the organization's strategic goals and budget, and constantly monitoring its performance against them;
- approving major capital expenditures, making decisions around the acquisition or disposal of major operational resources, determining investment strategies, managing society debts and liabilities and exercising a general fiduciary responsibility over all organizational decisions and activities;
- identifying and monitoring risk and challenges to the organization, and taking the necessary steps for risk mitigation;
- ensuring compliance with legal and community requirements including the BC Society's Act, Labour Laws, SFU Policies and Procedures, contracts, insurance providers, etc.;
- providing a vision and direction to the management staff and meeting the requirements of employers including providing regular performance evaluations, ensuring workplace safety, investing in professional development, etc.

In addition to these overarching responsibilities, the Vice President of External Relations also has a distinct portfolio of duties. The following is a list of some of the responsibilities I took on during my two consecutive terms:



- Government Relations – In my opinion, government relations is the most important duty of the External Relations portfolio. Much of the lobbying and advocacy work the SFSS does is directed at various levels of the government. It is impotent to maintain a healthy working relationship with municipal leaders, provincials MLAs and federal MPs. There are many opportunities to connect with these individuals, but it is important to be proactive and leverage the External Relations role in opening up communication channels.



- Media Relations – The President of the Board is considered to be the face of the organization on campus, but the External Relations role usually becomes the face of the organization beyond the campus. Many times, the person serving in the External Relations role is also tasked with responding to media inquiries and serving as the Board's spokesperson. This strategy is very effective and ensures that the Board is able to maintain a united voice and fact check any information before it is publicized.



- Representation at Events – The External Relations officer serves as the official representative of the Board at many external events. Usually, the President and External Relations officer attend large events together as they serve as an important networking opportunity. Examples of events include: Burnaby Excellence in Business Awards, Greater Vancouver Board of Trade Luncheon, BC Throne Speech, etc.



- Student Advocacy – The External Relations portfolio ultimately exists to further student advocacy and the best interest of the membership. It is important to regularly connect with the membership to ensure the work the society is prioritizing aligns with their needs. Some ways of staying connected include conducting regular campus-wide surveys, holding town-halls, attending student organized events, connecting with campus leaders, etc.



2018-2020 HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

ADVOCACY SURVEY 2018	A campus-wide survey conducted to understand the needs and priorities of students. The results of this survey were used to determine lobbying and campaign priorities for the organization. The insights were also useful in Board decision making.
GP-44 MOU	Developed and signed a memorandum of understanding between SFU and the SFSS on the GP-44 sexual violence and prevention policy on campus. This MOU added more clarity to the jurisdiction of the policy, and increased protections for SFSS members.
RENT WITH RIGHTS	Worked alongside the SFU Residence Hall Association (RHA) in proposing a number of changes to the SFU Residence License Agreement. These negotiations led to more student-focused agreements and improved privacy measures.
BC BUDGET 2019 CONSULTATIONS	Presented a list of budget recommendations to the provincial Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. Recommendations focused on addressing the challenges around student housing supply and costs.
SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND PREVENTION	Worked with the Women's Centre and Out on Campus to improve the design, information, and size of the consent toolboxes we offer to students. This redesign also initiated collaborations with SFU increased awareness around consent and safe sex.
2018 FALL PROVINCIAL LOBBYING TRIP	Led a Board delegation to the Legislative Assembly in Victoria with UBC AMS, and the BCFS to lobby for students issues. Topics included eliminating interest on student loans, increasing funding to Open Education Resources, and regulating international student tuition fees.
NATIONAL ENERGY BOARD SUBMISSION	Submitted a letter of comment to the National Energy Board in relation to the Trans Mountain marine shipping taking place near SFU Burnaby. This letter expressed SFSS's concerns with the perceived likelihood of a spill in the Burrard Inlet and an increased fire safety hazard risk.
WEBSITE REFRESH FOR ADVOCACY WORK	Worked with the SFSS Communications Office to create an advocacy and lobbying section on the SFSS website. This section details the current campaigns the organization is focusing on, and updates the membership on the progress we make through our lobbying efforts.
U-PASS BC CONTRACT	Represented the SFSS on U-Pass Student Advisory Caucus where student unions gather to engage in business surrounding the U-Pass BC contract. Following the renegotiation of the contract, I also led a campus-wide campaign to ratify the contract via a referendum vote.
TUITION FREEZE COLLABORATION	Collaborated with a student organized group named Tuition Freeze SFU to raise awareness about the increasing cost of post-secondary education. The SFSS supported this group through an official endorsement, donating meeting space, and sending delegates to important gatherings.
MY SSP STUDENT AMBASSADOR	Represented the SFSS on the My SSP Advisory Committee where we worked alongside SFU to address mental health challenges on campus.





SFU GONDOLA SUPPORT	Worked with SFU VP External Relations, Joanne Curry, to organize some joint efforts around the SFU Gondola project. This collaboration included accompanying SFU to events hosted by city and government representatives and directly reaching out to various MPs and MLAs.
CLOSING THE COPY CENTRE	Analyzed the current state of the SFSS Copy Centre and made a case to the Board on how the organization can cut costs by closing the in-house service. This process required support from SFSS management and staff and a careful analysis of our alternative printing options.
HIRING A NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Represented the Board on an internal hiring committee tasked with hiring a new Executive Director for the SFSS. We hired a recruitment agency to ensure our hiring process met industry standards, attracted the highest quality of candidates, and yielded the best results.
2019 SPRING FEDERAL LOBBYING TRIP	Led a delegation of SFSS representatives on a lobbying trip to Ottawa. During this trip we met with Policy Staff, MPs, and Ministers on issues important to our membership. Our priorities included making post secondary campuses more accessible, increasing support for refugee students, and increasing safety around the Burnaby Mountain Tank Farm.
2019/2020 BOARD TRANSITION SUPPORT	Supported the incoming Executive Director and President in organizing the Board orientation and welcome retreat. Also filled in for the President as the designated point-person in his absence during the summer term.
REDEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC PLAN	Worked alongside the Board and staff to develop a 3-year strategic plan for the organization. This planning process also including making changes to existing operational procedures to better serve our mission.
BC BUDGET 2020 CONSULTATIONS	Presented a list of budget recommendations to the provincial Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. Recommendations included investing in needs-based grants, revising the Tuition Limit Policy, providing an income based renters' rebate and distributing a portion of the BC Student Housing Loan Program to post-secondary institutions.
FEDERAL BUDGET 2020 CONSULTATIONS	Submitted budget recommendations to the federal government. Recommendations included the federal government funding 40% of the total cost of construction for the SFU Gondola and investing \$608 million in the Surrey Langley SkyTrain project in Metro Vancouver.
UPDATING ORGANIZATIONAL LOBBYING PLAN	Developed a new lobbying plan by compiling some of the advocacy topics we are carrying forward from the previous Board term, and some new initiatives that have been identified as priorities by our membership. This plan allowed the organization to make informed decisions around committee budgeting, staff resources and strategic goals.
STUDENT CARE ANNUAL MEETING	Represented the SFSS at the Student Care Annual Meeting in Montreal. This meeting is held to discuss changes and opportunities to the extended health and dental plan the SFSS provides to its membership.
BCFS ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM	Represented the SFSS at the BC Federation of Students (BCFS) Annual Symposium. This event provides an opportunity to connect with other student unions and leaders in the province to discuss advocacy work and organizational priorities.



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**AMS STUDENT
UNION
DEVELOPMENT
SUMMIT**

Represented the SFSS at the Alma Mater Society's (AMS) Annual Student Union Development Summit. This summit it organized to provide an introduction of student unions to incoming student leaders from across Canada. It is also a great development opportunity.

**FALL KICKOFF
2019 SUPPORT**

Led the Fall Kickoff Afterparty Subcommittee which was in charge of organizing logistics for the party and on-site event management for the day of. Duties included ensuring the safety of attendees, organizing external vendors, and working with venue staff on event direction,

**2019 FEDERAL
ELECTION
AWARENESS**

Organized a campaign around the 2019 federal election to inform the SFSS membership on when, where and how to vote. This campaign included working with media outlets, supporting the execution of different voting options and providing information to new voters.

**SUB TOURS AND
PROMOTION**

Worked with SFSS staff to promote the new Student Union Building through "sneak peak" tours that allowed members to take a look at the construction progress first-hand.

**FALL 2019
PROVINCIAL
LOBBYING TRIP**

Led a Board delegation to the Legislative Assembly in Victoria with UBC AMS and the BCFS to lobby for students issues. Topics included increasing student financial aid, capping tuition fees for international students, and reviewing post-secondary sexual violence and misconduct policies across the province,

**SPRING 2020
FEDERAL
LOBBYING TRIP**

Organized a federal lobbying trip for the month of April 2020, however, due to COVID-19 this trip was cancelled. Lobbying preparations included advocacy around various topics such as removing interest on the federal portion of student loans, increasing support for refugee students and funding public transportation projects in Metro Vancouver.

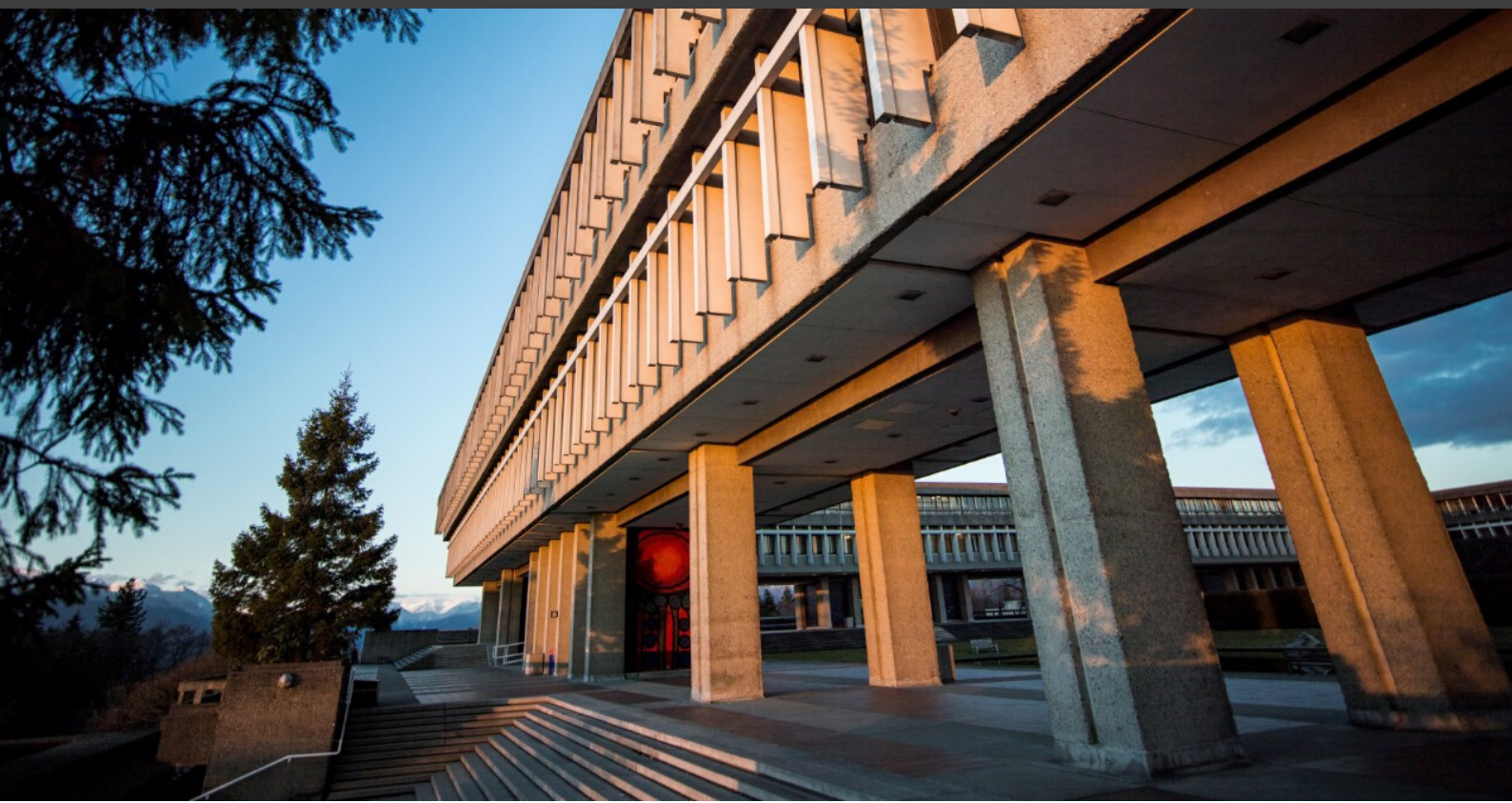
**COVID-19
ADVOCACY**

Worked with Board members to organize advocacy efforts around supporting students during the COVID-19 pandemic. We focused on issues like ensuring international students in BC are included in provincial financial assistance programs, advocating for the inclusion of students living on residence in the BC Temporary Rental Supplement, and supporting an increase in funding for the federal student summer jobs program.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCOMING VP EXTERNAL RELATIONS

1. Familiarize yourself with the BC Society's Act, SFSS Bylaws, BC Employment Standards Act, organizational strategic plan, annual budget, previous annual advocacy and lobbying plans, and review exit reports from other Board members.
2. Connect with your counterparts in other student unions, particularly at the Alma Mater Society, University of Victoria Student Society, BC Federation of Students, Alliance of BC Students and the SFU External Relations Office. There will be many opportunities to collaborate with these organizations.
3. Meet with SFSS staff, specifically with the Campaigns and Policy Research Coordinator since that will be your main point of contact for research and policy support. The SFSS Staff is an amazing resource since they do not turnover every year like the Board. I recommend developing healthy working relationships with Staff and asking for help when you need it.
4. Begin drafting an achievable list of goals and priorities. Due to the nature of lobbying and advocacy work, you will be carrying over many initiatives from previous years. Remember to check that your goals and priorities are in-line with the organizational strategic plan. Also, remember to present this plan to the Board so everyone is on the same page.
5. Engage in Board development opportunities to learn the necessary skills you need to succeed in your role. If you require additional support and training for duties such as media relations, reach out to your President and organize additional training and support.
6. Take your role seriously. As a director, you represent over 26,000 undergraduate students and you are responsible for the reputation of the SFSS. This role is only what you make of it and professional conduct is key to success. I suggest you dress professionally, use society space appropriately, use professional language, work with integrity, and lead with the society's purpose and values in mind.
7. Embrace your responsibilities. This is the opportunity of a lifetime and serving on the Board is going to be as great of a learning experience as you decide to make of it. I recommend that you welcome challenges, learn from your peers, staff, and the members that you serve, and step up as a leader whenever one is needed. You do not have to be skilled at everything or have all the answers, simply being willing to learn and utilize the resources available to you will guide you along the way.
8. Focus and prioritize in a meaningful way. Your term is only a year long, and you will quickly learn that that is a very short period of time for all the goals you may have in mind. Do not bite off more than you can chew, and focus on the core priorities of the organization and your portfolio.
9. Create a realistic weekly schedule. Since you are still a full-time student and probably have other extra-circular and personal commitments, time management should be your priority. This role will require sacrifices at times, however, you can minimize these sacrifices by planning ahead and being real with what you can achieve.
10. Take care of yourself. Serving on the Board is probably going to be unlike any other experience you have had so far. This may be the first time you are publicly criticized for your decisions, held legally and financially responsible for a multi-million dollar organization, expected to lead a staff that is much older and experienced than you are, and held accountable for decisions your predecessors may have made. Lean on your fellow Board members for support when times get tough, but do not let the challenges discourage you from serving to the best of your ability.



CLOSING REMARKS

The past two years have been the most challenging and rewarding years of my personal and professional life. I began this journey back in 2018 when I had very limited knowledge of what the SFSS was and the role that I was stepping into. Naturally, there was a huge learning curve and I was genuinely frightened by the thought of not being able to live up to the expectations of my peers and everyone that had elected me to represent them. Although it felt like I was carrying this heavy weight of expectations, the pressure quickly turned into motivation. Immersing myself in the history of student movements and the power of student leadership served as an endless inspiration that enabled me to step up and serve to the best of my ability. Along the way there have been setbacks, disappointments, and even failures, but they all pale in the face of the fulfilment I feel from seeing all the progress we have made in the past two years.

The work I did in this role will always be dear to my heart. I am leaving this role with amazing memories, a sense of pride, and friendships that will last for a lifetime. Taking on this role was not a part of my plan, but it ended up being an experience of a lifetime. This role strengthened my sense of self and taught me the value of integrity, fearlessness, and leadership. I would like to thank the SFSS membership from the bottom of my heart for electing me to serve as your Vice President of External Relations for the past two years. It has been an absolute honour and I will continue to cherish the time that I have spent serving the SFSS.