

Condemning Simon Fraser University for Tuition Increases for the 2020-2021 Academic Year

Prepared by Osob Mohamed, President

October 2nd, 2020

Tuition has become increasingly unaffordable over the past several decades, as post-secondary institutions rely more on tuition fees for funding, and less on government support. Despite running a significant budget surplus of over \$40M, SFU has decided to increase tuition once again for the 2020-2021 academic year, at a rate of 2% for domestic students, and 4% for international students. Despite the wide reach of student movements such as Tuition Freeze Now, the 2019-2020 proposal to increase tuition 2% for domestic undergraduates and up to 16% for international undergraduates was also approved despite vocal student push back. Tuition fees have more than doubled since 2001, and the average cost of an undergraduate degree has increased by almost \$14,000. [\[1\]](#) This has become a worrying trend in an exploitative system that has not ceased even during the biggest pandemic in our lifetimes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating impacts for SFU students. Our Spring 2020 Undergraduate survey found that more than 30% of respondents had incurred significant study equipment costs, almost 15% incurring significant travel costs, and approximately 35% of respondents reporting they were unsure of their academic future and ability to continue their studies as a result of their financial position [\[2\]](#). Students are facing crushing debts, a decimated job market, and being forced to take up employment which may significantly increase their risks of contracting COVID-19. 48.9% of respondents to our Spring survey stated that they are experiencing mental health issues due to COVID-19. The financial and academic challenges students are facing due to COVID-19 pandemic are further compounding the existing mental health challenges they face coping with a pandemic, prolonged isolation, and extreme stress.

The summer semester was a key example of the significantly decreased quality of education at our University. Multiple calls were made from the SFSS and grassroots student groups, such as the SFU COVID-19 Coalition, for SFU to concede the drop in quality of education and implement a tuition deferment and waiver, but these were denied. SFU's 2020-2021 budget draft was provided to the SFSS earlier this year with extremely limited time to provide meaningful feedback, and limited communication to students, staff and faculty on the budget development, amendment and approval process.

The University has claimed that tuition increases go back into student services, awards, and scholarships. In the SFSS's budget feedback provided to SFU's Vice-President Finance and Administration in March 2020, we noted that the portion of the revenue from tuition hikes (particularly from international students) has been increasing at a much higher rate than the funding going into the aforementioned areas (domestic tuition seems to be following a similar trend, likely due to the 2% per year increase cap mandated by the provincial government). A freeze, and subsequent decrease in tuition fees would negate the need to increase funding to areas such as scholarships, bursaries and awards as a result of reduced financial pressures on students.

Undergraduate students make up the largest portion of SFU community members. A condemnation vote passed by the membership would send an undeniable message to the University- that we cannot

and will not allow tuition to increase, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Condemnation votes have been used in student societies and labour unions alike, for the purpose of rallying membership behind a certain issue and sending a strong message to the institution that the membership demands change. A formal, public group condemnation can be a powerful tool in the lead up to a bigger action, and to a direct concession from the University in the near future.

Motion:

Whereas Simon Fraser University undergraduate students have reported unprecedented financial hardship in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic;

Whereas one of the strategic priorities of the Simon Fraser Student Society is to advocate and push for the financial health and wellbeing of our members;

Whereas the Simon Fraser University Board of Governors passed a vote in favour of implementing a 2% increase in tuition for domestic undergraduate students, and 4% for international undergraduate students for the 2020-2021 academic year despite the extreme financial hardship being faced by our membership during the COVID-19 pandemic;

Be it resolved that the Membership of the Simon Fraser Student Society condemn Simon Fraser University for increasing tuition fees by 2% for domestic students and 4% for international students for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Be it further resolved that the Membership of the Simon Fraser Student Society formally demands a response from the Board of Governors and University Administration on a plan of action to withdraw the tuition fee increases for the 2020-2021 academic year, and to address the other impacts of the pandemic on undergraduate students.