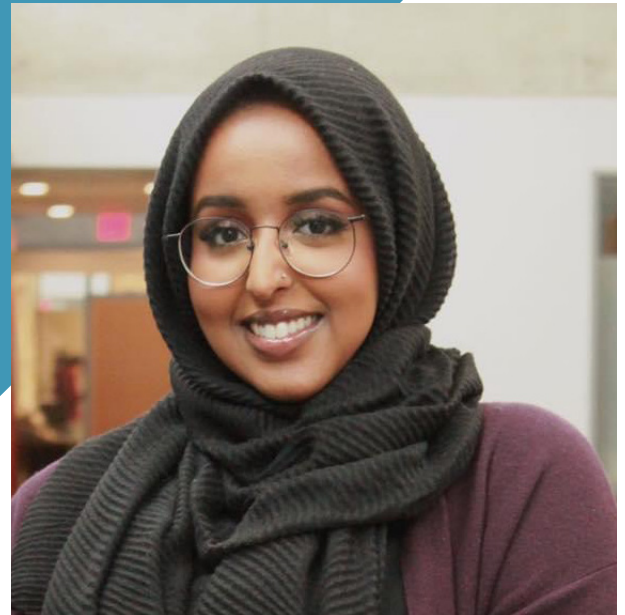


simon fraser
student society

**SFSS BOARD
OF DIRECTORS
SEMESTER
REPORT**



Osob Mohamed
President

May 2020 - Aug 2020

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Executive Summary

My name is Osob Mohamed, and I am the President of the Simon Fraser Student Society for the 2020-2021 year. I am the chairperson of the Board of Directors, the Executive Committee, and the HR and Personnel Committee. I have a seat on each of our Board committees. It has been an absolute pleasure thus far, and we had an eventful and successful summer term. I ran on a platform of building student power, and student society reform from the inside out. The previous year set some good precedents in terms of bringing the SFSS back to its roots of student activism and advocacy, and with a Board of progressive and equity-focus students, I am confident that this will continue to be a successful year, and one that will help set the building blocks for future Boards to follow.

COVID-19 has shaped our term from the very beginning, having to shift from our regular, in-person services and programming to going almost entirely online. It has been a major transition, but our Board of Directors, staff and volunteers have all been working diligently to make it work, and to provide students with the quality of support they deserve. Having to do pretty much everything virtually has been a challenge in and of itself, but I really valued the times I was able to come into the office and see some of the other Board members (socially distanced and masked, of course).

As a returning Board member, I can say that this year has been 100% different from my previous experience. Most notably, my responsibilities as a faculty representative are completely different from what is expected of the President, and while some of the portfolio pieces such as chairing the Board, meeting with and pushing for student rights at the University and government levels, and acting as the spokesperson for the organization are right up my alley, there is so much going on in the background, such as staff relations and ensuring the renewal and upholding of different agreements with stakeholders is a huge shift from what I've had to do in the past. It's been a huge learning curve for me, but I am grateful to have had the support of a hard-working, dedicated Board the entire way through. This report is definitely not exhaustive, so for a more detailed view of what I and other Board members have been working on, I strongly encourage you to check out our bi-weekly reports which outlines the different things we work on, on a day-to-day basis. See them [here!](#)

While I will delve deeper into the specifics of the projects I worked on, some of the major changes and projects that took place during the summer semester included the Administrative and Governance restructuring, COVID-19 related advocacy and the SFSS COVID-19 survey, working with the SFU COVID-19 Coalition, advocating for Black students and the BLM movement, pushing the University to cut ties with the RCMP and reduce police presence on campus, supporting the Bylaw review project, various hiring committees and job description development, planning and coordinating Board development sessions, the BC Budget consultations, and more.

I am both excited and nervous to see what is in store for the next couple of semesters. With the ongoing bylaw review project, our upcoming AGM, and the recently called BC Provincial election, it is going to be a non-stop year. Lets see what happens next!

Completed Projects

Governance and Administrative Restructuring

Summary:

One of the first major projects was regarding a restructuring of both our governance and administrative structures. This is a multi-faceted project, some aspects of which are still ongoing and will be discussed in the “Ongoing Projects” section of this report. Here, I will be discussing the pieces which were completed over the course of the summer term. This included the review, which took place during May and June, and the policy review and redevelopment, which took place after the Board accepted the new model as described below.

Previous Boards employed a model known as the Carver model, also known as the Policy Governance model. In this model, governance was placed under the jurisdiction of the Board, while all operational matters were under the jurisdiction of the CEO or Executive Director. This meant no board involvement in management activities, very few committees, and the potential to create an environment where Board members were unaware of all internal goings-on in the Society. We noticed that this didn't work for a number of reasons, as changes to member services often happened without Board knowledge or approval, and the CEO or Executive Director were the only points of contact between staff and board members.

To complete this review, the Executive Committee members reviewed job descriptions, employment contracts, and reporting requirements for current administrative employees. Additionally, we reviewed the governance and administrative structures of other student societies in and outside of British Columbia. The Executive Committee had also completed a thorough analysis of the administrative history of the SFSS, with consideration of the pros and cons of each respective model. In the end, we decided to transition to a structure that

gave the Board more oversight on operational matters, while still maintaining staff support in areas we deemed necessary. We named it the Policy-Administrative Hybrid Model, and redid our policies to reflect these changes.

This portion of the restructuring was the most time consuming, as I also took time to meet individually with all of our coordinators and administrative assistants to talk about the changes taking place, coordinating with our legal consultants to make sure we were doing our due diligence in all aspects, and hiring on a Transition Manager to support us through the process.

Timeline: Complete

Welcome Day & Events

Summary:

Despite having been held 100% virtually, I believe that Welcome Day, Clubs Days and other student welcome events were a huge success! I was able to record a video to share with both new and returning students at the Welcome Day ceremony, which was a great honour and I was able to connect with many new students through that platform. Our VP Student Life Jennifer and I were a part of SFU's working group to plan, and develop content for Welcome Day, and we were able to give feedback, and even suggest an MC for the event (she did a great job!)

I was also able to virtually table and attend our Clubs Days, which had great feedback and student turnout. Of course, none of this would have happened without the diligent and dedicated work of our staff, and thankfully the event went off smoothly. I also attended and tabled at SFU's services fair, where I was able to share with students more about the SFSS, and the kinds of advocacy, services and events we provided for them.

In our new virtual landscape, taking advantage of any and all engagement opportunities is crucial to the success of the SFSS, and the wellbeing of our membership. I'm looking forward to attending these events again in the future, and working with the Board to see how we can develop more of our own.

Timeline: Complete

Ongoing Projects

COVID-19 Advocacy

Summary:

Our COVID-19 related advocacy has taken a number of forms, one of the most useful thus far being the COVID-19 Undergraduate Survey. This was a project I took on at the end of my previous Board term as the Faculty of Health Sciences Representative, to gain insight on the financial, academic and health impacts the sudden transition to online learning and social isolation had on our membership. The survey had a great turnout, with more than 2400 students filling it out- I believe one of our best survey turnouts thus far.

The results of the survey showed that students are undeniably suffering the consequences of both the pandemic, and the University's lack of appropriate action to support students. Almost half of the respondents said that they experienced a heavier workload despite the extremely stressful circumstances students were already under, and that 45.9% had experienced a significant decline in their mental health. More than 35% of students also said that they were unsure of their ability to enroll in future semesters due to the financial strain they were under.

We teamed up with the SFU COVID-19 Coalition, which is a grassroots organization made up of different student and labour groups at SFU to demand better from the University for our community members. With them, we held a successful town hall at which I was able to speak on as a panelist, and developed a set of demands that have been regularly updated as our situation develops.

Goals: Pushing for more academic leniency from the University, including a commitment to ban the use of invasive invigilation softwares, rolling back tuition increases for the 2020-2021 academic year, and more funding being allocated to financial aid for students

Timeline: Likely for the remainder of the Board term

Student Advocate Office

Summary:

The development of a Student Advocacy Office and the hiring of a Student Advocate is another project that has continued from my previous term on the Board. While SFU does have an Ombudsperson that students can contact for some forms of support, we felt that our members deserved someone who was fully funded through the SFSS, and therefore would be partial only to the students. We have drafted job descriptions, which outlines the position as one that is a voice for students who need support, and can advocate on their behalf as they navigate through crisis situations in a University setting. The advocacy priorities and main areas of services include, but are not limited to, support and guidance through conflict, disciplinary and misconduct matters, health and wellness concerns, campus safety, sexual and other forms of harassment and discrimination.

This will be a crucial position as students navigate this post-COVID university setting, particularly as more and more students contact us reporting mistreatment and misconduct coming from their instructors in classroom settings. Having to deal with an accusation of academic dishonesty or an instructor who is violating your rights as a student is extremely daunting and stressful, and we are hoping this support will make the experience better for the students.

Goals: Once a hiring committee has been struck, to begin the hiring process

Timeline: Before the end of the Fall 2020 semester

New Support Staff Hiring

Summary:

As a secondary part to our administrative restructuring, we developed 2 new positions for the SFSS- a Board Organizer and an Operations Organizer. The Executive Committee recommended a transition to an Administrative Board (Policy-Administrative Board Hybrid Governance Model, as mentioned above), and reducing the number of administrations to 4, with 3 continuing as long-term administration. This structure will be made up of the Board Organizer (BO), Operations Organizer (OO) and the Building Manager.

The Executive Committee recommended an administrative structure that redistributes management tasks to the Executive Committee who are supported by two excluded staff- the Board Organizer (BO) and Operations Organizer (OO). The BO reports directly to the President, and provides support to the Board of Directors. They would work closely to support the Executive in all aspects of Board stewardship. Main tasks would include providing logistical support, serving as a liaison to external parties on request of the Executive, scheduling meetings with stakeholders on behalf of Executives and Board members. The BO would oversee the Administrative Assistants. The BO would support the Board in planning key committee and Board meetings. This includes tracking, monitoring and follow up on the progress of projects; tracking meeting participants, action items and strategies that emanate from the BO's office; collecting and ensuring the preparation and distribution of appropriate materials; and initiation of subsequent follow up meetings.

The Operations Organizer (OO) will report to the President, and provide human resources support to the SFSS, and is responsible for the smooth operation of SFSS facilities, and members facing services at the discretion of the Board. This would include monthly reports on metrics of all services, reviewing and proposing amendments for the annual budget, coordinating the Annual General Meeting and other tasks as directed by the Board. The OO would also act as a human resources individual, in providing advice regarding job descriptions, managing job postings, recruiting, training, and coaching administrative personnel, and acting as the primary Staff Liaison Officer (SLO) alongside the President and the Board Labour Committee. Other major responsibilities of the OO are facility

management, which includes assisting and training member facing staff, scheduling and evaluating performance of member facing staff, and other operational tasks as delegated by the Board.

The job posting for the Operations Organizer is live, and will be closing on October 14th. The Hiring Committee for the Board Organizer position will be meeting up as well, to finalize and prepare for the posting of that position as well. We are really looking forward to bringing on a candidate that has experience working in a student-activist setting, and who will be able to provide the Board with the kind of continuity that is needed to keep the Society alive with the high turnover rate.

Goals: Complete the hiring processes for both positions, onboarding and preparing both for the Board turnover this coming Spring/Summer semester.

Timeline: Before the end of the Fall 2020 semester.

Burnaby Mountain Gondola

Summary:

The Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project has been supported by the SFSS for nearly a decade now. Over 88% of our members regularly use public transportation to commute to class, and nearly 95 percent of SFU undergraduate students consider reliable TransLink services important or very important.

In January 2020, the previous Board and University and Academic Affairs Committee hosted a Gondola Open House, in which we shared information and gathered feedback from our membership on the Burnaby Mountain Gondola project over 2 days. The SFSS has been in support of a BMG for more than a decade, and we are thrilled to see the project come so far. Of the students who participated in the open house, 84% indicated that their preference was for the route directly from Production Way station to SFU, and was considered the most efficient and effective option. The route connected through Lake-City way station was the least preferred, as it had the longest travel times and was an inconvenient option for students coming from the East.

In the 2018 feasibility study, it was quoted that 50,000 hrs of diesel bus operations would be eliminated, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 1700 tons a year. We are in the midst of a climate crisis - and we are seeing the consequences right from the windows of our homes. I've been at SFU for many years, and I cannot tell you how many times I was either stranded at Production Way, stranded at SFU, or genuinely unsure if I would make it back from school safely. Less people on the roads during treacherous weather is the safest option for the entire community. Additionally, BMG will cost less to run than the current fleet of diesel buses. It will save taxpayer money (\$35 million over a 30-year period), and the Gondola cost is \$54.2 million less in bus operating costs of \$89.3 million without the gondola. We participated in a number of consultation events, and will continue to push for student interests with regard to this project.

Timeline: Not determined

Joint Operations Group and Meetings with SFU President

Summary:

Along with our VP University Relations, I attend a monthly meeting with the GSS and SFU Administration (including key individuals from their finance department, academic department and student services) named the Joint Operations Group. Essentially, this is where we raise major student issues, either to gain more information on a particular topic, or to discuss issues we would like to see resolved. Some of the major topics from the summer semester included issues around exam invigilation, particularly the use of webcam invigilation, Proctorio and similar softwares, questions regarding SFU's reported surplus, and where that funding was being allocated, and issues surrounding student safety during the pandemic. As of right now, we are preparing for the SFU budget consultations, and successfully lobbied for a longer time period for the student societies to give feedback on the budget.

Myself, and the GSS VP External also attend monthly meetings with the SFU President, Andrew Petter for the duration of the summer term. This is where we bring up the major items under their direct purview, such as issues that went unresolved at JOG, and the SFU Athletics team name change this semester. This is not necessarily a project, but rather a major pillar of university relations that has us directly at the table with key decision makers at the university. A major win on our end is the official launch of the Student Affordability Working Group, which I will discuss in more detail below.

Goals: To gather key information, and push for student interests to decision makers at SFU

Timeline: Ongoing

Student Affordability Working Group

Summary:

The Student Affordability Working Group is made up of representatives from the GSS, and SFU Administration, and is a working group of JOG. The premise of the groups is to examine some of the areas where we can collaborate to relieve financial burdens from students, and give them the opportunity to make everyday life a little more affordable.

We are preparing a press release for the SFU community, to inform them of the purpose of the group, and to share about the topics we've decided to tackle first. The SFSS has already committed to food security and Open Education Resource (OER) projects, and we are hoping to be able to gain additional support on them through this committee, while also working with the GSS and University to explore new avenues for cost-savings.

1. Food Security
2. Open Educational Resources and Course Material Costs
3. Financial Predictability

Goals: To develop tools and resources to relieve students of non-tuition related financial burdens

Timeline: Ongoing

Black Lives Matter & Defunding the Police/RCMP

Summary:

In June, the SFSS released a [statement](#) situating ourselves in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, and standing in solidarity with all Black lives that have been touched by state-sanctioned violence at the hands of the criminal justice system. As a board, we decided to engage in conversations with the University regarding their relationship with the police and RCMP in the area, and ways that we would like to see this relationship reconsidered, and eventually terminated. We are very cognizant of the harm the police and justice system perpetuates on people of colour, particularly Indigenous and Black people in Canada. For our students, it can be an anxiety-inducing and traumatic experience to have to deal with police in career fairs, events, or on patrol- particularly in a place where they should feel safe.

This brought up some interesting conversation from SFSS Council, where I subsequently delivered a report containing a number of resources for councillors to look into to learn more about the issues at hand.

We have had conversations with administrators in SFU's campus safety department, at JOG, and with the SFU President. We will be continuing the conversations at a student safety meeting.

Goals: Have SFU commit to no longer allowing police to attend Career or Services fairs and other SFU events, and reduce police presence on campus as much as possible.

Timeline: Spring 2021 semester

Bylaw Review & AGM Planning

Summary

I sit on both the Bylaw review committee and the AGM planning committee. As a member, I have been following along, providing feedback, and supporting the work on the bylaw proposals, and I also worked to write a condemnation motion regarding SFU's tuition hikes for the 2020-2021 academic year, and an address to the membership that has been included in the annual report to the membership. I have also been a part of conversations with MECS on technical support, and developing a plan to hold an AGM virtually (which is a new hurdle for us as well). Thus far, there have been no major issues and I believe we are well on our way to hosting a successful AGM.

We are now moving into the campaigning part of the AGM preparation, and we have discussed different ways to encourage students to attend, and also to learn more about our proposals and other business. We are hoping that the tuition condemnation vote will bring students out to the AGM, as we've really noticed an uptick in student outrage and desire to act on SFU's unfair treatment of students and insistence that the education quality at SFU has not suffered during the pandemic. We have formally received the support of the SFSS Council, who will be key players in ensuring our effective communication with different department and faculty student unions, and constituency groups. I will be chairing this AGM, and will prepare myself accordingly.

Goals: Host the AGM on October 26th, 2020

Timeline: Now until October 26th

Board Development

Summary:

As the President, one of my duties has been to coordinate Board Development Sessions for each alternating week (when we don't have Board meetings), and find facilitators to support us with different projects, or work with the VPs to host sessions that relate to their particular portfolios. So far, we have had sessions with Health and Counselling Services, SFPIRG, the Indigenous Student Centre, Tom Abbott NPC (support with strategic planning), and more.

We will be having more development sessions for the Fall semester that are relevant to our growth as Board members, and in gaining that knowledge will allow us to better serve our students. Some areas where we are looking to explore include sustainability, digital organizing, and racial justice and equity.

Goals: Hosting bi-weekly sessions to support Board members in effectively executing their portfolios by developing key skills

Timeline: Ongoing

Pain Points

1. Communication during an all-online term

During a normal board term, there would be ample opportunity for us as board members to see each other, catch up, and work together on projects from campus and our offices. Having to communicate nearly exclusively online has added a barrier, which when you're trying to liaise with 15 other people can become very overwhelming. During the beginning of my term, I tried to schedule time to catch up with each board member, and I am hoping to do something similar this semester as well (a couple of times at least). While I do review work reports and have an understanding of what goes on, it's still hard to keep up with at times. I will continue to work on ensuring that tasks that are not under my specific purview are delegated out to the other board members, and not just the VPs as I fear overburdening them as many have their own portfolio pieces to oversee at any given time.

We have been having monthly socials for the Board to enjoy and spend time together, and we have a Discord channel which has been a great medium for us and students at-large on our committees to keep in constant contact with. Strongly recommend using Discord over Slack!

2. Student Outreach

Trying to reach students solely online has its pros and cons. On one hand, we've been hosting many events online, which is often more accessible to some students than hosting them in person. We have a stellar events team that has been cranking out events all summer and planning well into the Fall, so it has definitely been a success thus far. On the other hand, a well-used and very successful tactic to engage students on different projects and advocacy pieces has been tabling, posterizing, and giving out material that is difficult to do online. This has made it pretty much impossible to host some of the actions and other activities that we may have been able to do if we were physically on campus. This term has definitely been one of firsts, and we are learning more and more about digital organizing every day, and ways to make outreach more effective. We've signed up for platforms such

as New/Mode, which I think will really help us to coordinate some of our campaigns in the upcoming semester. As much as I'd love to be back on campus, speaking to students face-to-face and rallying them up to support our initiatives, we will make do with what we have.

3. Burnout

The first few months of the summer semester were incredibly busy, and I found myself putting in more hours into the SFSS than I had ever imagined. There were some weeks where I had upwards of 20 meetings, and spent hours reading, drafting and preparing documents for our Board meetings, regarding the administrative restructuring and more. Honestly, I don't know how I did it. Unfortunately, this caused me to burn out pretty badly around the end of the summer semester, and I am now getting back into the groove of things as the pace picks up. Perhaps I was lucky, as the end of the summer semester was definitely less busy than the beginning was, but it was still very difficult to try and coordinate my responsibilities and keep up with other's portfolios and projects.

I still haven't figured it out, but I am working on better allocating my time to find ways to wind down, as the SFSS can really become all-consuming at times. It's an interesting situation, considering that as a board member, I do see it as my responsibility to be available to students whenever they may need, but for my own sake it makes sense to take some time away every now and then I've begun to mute my social medias during some hours on the weekend, and it has helped a lot. Try to find that balance for yourself, the earlier the better.

Recommendations

One of my biggest recommendations to the future President is please, try to limit your responsibilities outside of the SFSS for the duration of your term. It is very difficult to predict how much time you'll be spending on SFSS related tasks. While it is expected of executives to put in approximately 60 hours bi-weekly, some weeks you will greatly exceed that number and some weeks you'll find yourself with much more free time than you expected. If you are to mix this with a heavy course load, or other major commitments, it will be a struggle to get it all done. As the spokesperson for the Society, you often have to be ready to make statements, or coordinate a board decision on a topic with a very short amount of time. I would recommend making yourself available during working hours 9-5PM as much as you can, and even try to take the Summer semester off school work to situate yourself better at the beginning of the term.

Additionally, I'd recommend finding an organizational system that works well for you. I've been using Notion, which has really helped me to keep track of the tasks I need to start, which ones I need to complete or follow up on, and the ones I've completed. It is really easy to fall behind in emails and other work, so try to stay on top of it as much as possible! Also, try to fill out your reports well ahead of time- it can be a hassle but is necessary to effectively communicate your work with the membership.

Ask for help when you need it! I am so grateful to be on a board with so many compassionate, hardworking people who are great at what they do. Learning to delegate tasks is awkward, but necessary. As the President, your portfolio includes a little bit of everyone else's, but oftentimes there is someone who you can communicate with to get something done, and it will be your job to support them to do it. In the end, as long as there is good dialogue between you and your board members (particularly with Execs regarding some of the more day-to-day operational items) and understanding of what is expected from whom, you're in good shape.

To the next president: good luck! I really hope that you'll be able to be back on campus for your term, and re-integrate into campus life. It's an incredible opportunity to serve as the President of the Society, but also a huge responsibility. Students have entrusted you to act

on their behalf and to fight for them, and to build student power so that we can attend a University that is safe, affordable, and where students' voices are heard and listened to. Take it seriously, and make sure you're looking out for the students whose voices need to be bolstered the most. We have a responsibility to protect marginalized students, and to ensure they are heard and listened to. Good luck!