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**student society**

**SFSS BOARD  
OF DIRECTORS  
SEMESTER  
REPORT**



**Corbett Gildersleve**  
**VP Finance**

**May 2020 - Aug 2020**



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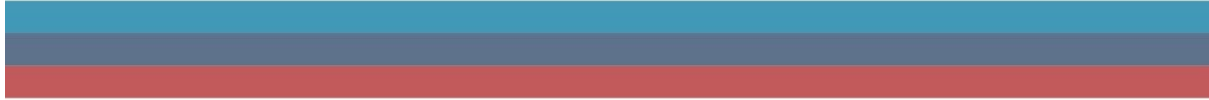
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This is my second time serving on the SFSS Board, but the first time serving as an executive and the experience has been both empowering, frustrating, and exhausting. It's a good thing I really enjoy this work or else I would have quit by now.

This Board has accomplished some amazing things in its first four months, from an entire governance and administrative review and restructuring to making good progress on bylaw reform, as well as reallocating space in the SUB for independent student societies and constituency groups. All these projects I have been involved with or been the lead.

With all this change, especially in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been tiring and frustrating, as projects have taken longer to complete. This has caused delays in the start of other projects, not only on my own, but with others. Our committees were delayed in getting formed, which means their own annual plans and projects were delayed in being developed and started. But, the core organizational changes that we have done were needed, not only to make the Society more accountable and democratic, but also to free up resources. These resources can now go towards expanding other areas of the organization that have been left to atrophy for years, like student advocacy.

I'm proud of what this Board and I have accomplished so far, and I hope that my next semester report will be full of completed projects and brand new ones on the go.

# COMPLETED PROJECTS

## Organizational Development Projects

### Audit Report

The audit process has been longer than normal due to COVID-19 requiring document collection and transmission to be done remotely as opposed to being on-site. Additionally, the administrative restructuring occurring at the start of the audit process did cause some challenges. However, we worked with the auditors and staggered termination dates based on the auditor's need to speak with the relevant admin. Normally the audit takes around a month, but this audit took twice as long.

I was brought in more over the last 3 weeks of the audit to help track down documents and answer questions about past board decisions. This has led to drafting briefing notes and passing multiple motions over three board meetings to fix past oversights or fix issues that were discovered over the course of the audit.

The audit report was fully approved at the Board meeting on August 25th. The report needs to be signed by the President and VP Finance. Additionally, we will have to draft a response to the Findings Letter from the Auditor about issues they raised. Some items have already started to be worked on.

## Finance and Administrative Services Committee Annual Plan

This year's Board has recommended that each core committee develop an annual plan of work and projects they would like to complete. Events, University and Academic Affairs, and other committees have developed and approved annual plans. At the first FASC meeting, we reviewed completed projects from last year as well as on-going or recommended projects from the committee, admin, and outgoing VP Finance. I compiled these recommendations with campaign promises made by Board members and developed a rough description and timeline of what projects could be completed. This plan was approved by the committee in early August and then by the Board in late August. The committee will then assign project leads, divide up work, and complete the projects.

# Governance Projects

## Governance Review and Restructuring

The Board started a Governance Review and Restructuring on May 15th, 2020 and tasked the Governance Committee to report back to the Board within 30 days on their progress. This task involved reviewing our current governance structure, researching other student societies, and making a recommendation to the Board on ways to restructure. We wished to move away from our current model as we believed that it was not suitable for the Student Society, with the Board being completely cut out of operational decisions and direction of the organization.

The Governance Committee, VP University Relations Gabe Liosis and reviewed the SFSS's Governance Model, it's current policies, and past policies. We also reviewed a number of student society governance structures in Canada to help inform our work. In this review, we added, updated, and/or removed a number of sections so that we can have a "best of both worlds" between our current and past policies (2015 Policy Manual). Anything that was redundant or out of date was removed or amended. Some sections like the Council and Elections Policies were removed to form their own standalone policies. A first draft of the Standing Orders and Rules were presented to the Governance Committee on May 28th and to the Board on May 29th for review and feedback.

Feedback was incorporated into the final report recommending to the Board to implement a Governance-Administrative Board Hybrid model that saw the merging of governance and operations work. The Board would oversee budget and policy decisions, a special HR and Personnel Committee would oversee HR matters (with direction from the Board), and the Executive Committee would oversee day-to-day operations decisions. This report went hand-in-hand with the Administrative Review and Restructuring project tasked to the Executive Committee by the Board.

In addition to approving the recommendations, the Board repealed and replaced the previous Operations Policies with two new policy manuals, the Board Policies (Standing Orders, Rules, and Regulations) and Administrative Policies. The admin policies were also divided up into standalone documents and uploaded to the website for easier viewing by our members.

## Board Reimbursement Guidelines

Board members can request certain reimbursements during their term of service. These requests have changed and expanded over the years and there were no central documents or guidelines around what can be reimbursed and the process. After discussing this with relevant staff and administration, the Finance Manager drafted up guidelines that I later shared with the Board to help have everyone on the same page. This should also help Boards going forward.

## Board and Committee Work Report Document Revamp

As VP Finance, it's my responsibility to coordinate the completion and posting of the Board Committee and Work Reports. The current design is an improvement over the previous versions in early 2019. However, the format caused some copy/paste issues due to it being a table within a table. Therefore, I created a report that simplifies the layout and improves readability by following Universal Design concepts without changing the reporting requirements.

The new report includes a table of contents for easier navigation, and each project, meeting, or event has their own dedicated entry. Additionally, after receiving feedback from the Board, Council, and the Accessibility Committee, I have added sections including meeting and project/event times, to better track the amount of work Board members are doing week to week.

## Board Development Sessions

### SFSS Financial Workshop

Vantage Point was hired to provide a financial workshop to the Board to better understand their financial statements and the audit process. Vantage Point found a facilitator and with help from myself and staff, she took a deep dive into our finances and then presented a summary to the Board. This was very useful as she came into the organization with a fresh perspective and was able to explain to us how to read the financial statements and annual budget. This was rather time intensive for myself and staff as we had multiple Zoom meetings to go over the financials, compile documents, and answer any questions that arose. In many ways, the facilitator performed a mini-audit of the organization. I recommend that this kind of workshop be run every year for the Board.

### Board Annual Plan

I contacted, coordinated, and helped facilitate a small part of the July 31st board development session around helping create an annual board plan. This plan needed to tie our campaign promises with the SFSS's Strategic Plan. Each campaign promise needs either a personal owner, or a committee owner in order for it to be tracked and completed. I also forwarded pre- and post-meeting information to the board including a feedback survey. The facilitators are interested in doing follow up sessions around reviewing the Board Plan, it's completion, and recommendations for future Boards.

## Other Projects

### Student Union Charity Donation

With the death of George Floyd, a black man killed by a white cop who kneeled on his neck for over eight minutes while he begged for his life, resulted in massive protests all over the US with mirrored protests in Canada and other countries. The SFSS released a statement supporting Black Lives Matter, donated \$3000 to the Black in BC COVID-19 Community Fund, and encouraged groups to support and donate to a number of causes.

Multiple student unions and constituency groups wished to donate their core funds, however current policies prevented these groups from being able to donate to external organizations. After discussions with Members Services and Board members, the Board suspended the relevant policy until August 1st to give student unions and constituency groups time to meet and donate. Additionally, in line with their earlier BLM statement, the Board restricted donations to Black and Indigenous-led causes.

This resulted in 15 Student Unions and Constituency Groups donating over \$5000 to over 15 black and/or indigenous-led causes.

# ON-GOING PROJECTS



## Organizational Development Projects

### Administrative Review and Restructuring

On May 15th, 2020 the Board of Directors decided to begin a Governance and Administrative Review and Restructuring as we wished to move away from our current model (Policy Governance) as we believe it is not the right fit for a number of reasons.

Working through the Executive Committee I reviewed our organizational and administrative structure, relevant policies, and reporting structure. A document was drafted that compiled administrative structures for multiple student societies across the country with a focus on BC. The review was finished and presented to the Board on June 12th, 2020. They approved the restructuring recommendations and tasked President Osob Mohamed and myself with carrying out the recommendations.

A transition plan was drafted and a transition manager, Lawrence Jones, was hired. We also discussed with the auditors the administrative restructuring to determine how these changes would impact our auditing process. This is important because the audit is required for the SFSS to continue to receive student fees through SFU. After our discussion, we staggered termination dates for affected administrators based on when the auditors finished their interviews with relevant administrators.

President Osob and I worked together to finalize the releases of some administrative staff. This involved consulting with our lawyer, directing the financial coordinators to finalize payroll and severance packages, and meet with affected staff to receive SFSS keys, equipment, and sign release forms.

With the HR and Personnel Committee formed and meeting, we started the process for hiring the Operations and Board Organizers. Job descriptions were reviewed and approved, and the Board passed a motion to form the hiring committees. The hiring will occur in the Fall term. Once hired, they will be onboarded by relevant Board members and Lawrence. Once they are comfortable in their role, our contract with the transition manager will finalize and this project will be complete.



## Board Drive Archive

The Board of Directors currently has no central archive of records on projects board members have worked on, meeting notes, etc. Currently if someone takes over an existing project, they need to gather items from other members' google drives and their own emails. This decreases efficiency and increases the loss of information. This project has been explored in past boards and I have found examples of work that I hope to build off of. Currently, I have started a "board drive" in the VP Finance google drive and have developed a basic folder structure and have started to populate it with this year's board work. Ideally, when we have settled on a home such as a drive, it will be easier to transfer it over rather than create it from scratch. This project is currently stalled while I focus on other projects of more importance.

## Budget Projection Update

I have received an update on the fall enrollment numbers from SFU. Overall the numbers are similar to Fall 2019. I have requested a rough breakdown in full-time/part-time numbers as that impacts our revenue.

With this information, and FIC's enrollment projection, we can create an updated budget projection. With strong enrollment numbers, our operational deficit will be shrunk from \$350K to something much less.

FASC can then make budget adjustment recommendations to the Board.

## Student Union Building Projects

### Staff Office Allocations

With the completion of the SUB set for the end of August and an office move from the MBC spaces to the SUB was being set up by Build SFU GM Marc Fontaine and Building Manager John Walsh, I took on the responsibility of allocating space for our staff in the SUB. The majority of staff and admin were expected to work in a central "hub" in level 3000 in the SUB. Looking at the current positions, recommendations from the Building Manager, and some future staff expansion plans of the Board, I allocated offices around keeping everyone more or less together by department and overall purpose. Staff gave feedback after taking a space tour and their requests were incorporated into the plan. For the most part, there were few changes beyond setting up a dedicated space in the Club Center for relevant Members Services Coordinators to provide better on-site support. This plan was approved by the Board on August 7th.

All current staff office allocations in the SUB have been approved, but the Board plans to create and fill new positions this year. As such, staff offices and resources will be ongoing and the Executive Committee has been delegated the responsibility of overseeing that.

## Board Office Move

I volunteered to be the Board liaison for the SUB which meant helping organize the Board-side of the office moves. I worked with both Marc Fontaine and John Walsh to determine timelines, what needed to be packed, and what would be removed at what dates. Because the Board had a wide variety of documents that spanned decades, we decided to try and organize the documents before packing them as we wished to later use these documents in creating an archive as well as decorate areas of the SUB with our history. This slowed down the process quite a bit, but thanks to multiple move dates, where the office was moved over in sections, we were successful in our organizing. I especially want to thank VP University Relations Gabe Liosis, Science Representative WeiChun Kua, and VP Student Services Matthew Provost for their work in organizing and packing up the office. The next step will be to set up the Board storage area when we gain access to the Board offices in the SUB.

## SUB 1000-Level Suite Allocations

While working on the staff office allocation project, I realized the space allocated in the 1000-level of the SUB for student orgs by the last board would not be effective for those groups. If those groups are not effective, then students will not be served well. So, I proposed to the Executive Committee and then the Board that we reallocate the suites so that each group would have a dedicated space. The SFSS would “give up” two spaces, but as there were no concrete plans for these spaces I argued it would better use the spaces for known issues rather than some future “what ifs”.

The proposal was accepted by the board, and they tasked Osob and I to reach out to the groups to discuss the proposal and finalize any leases. Each group was consulted and the response has been overall positive. CJSF wished to switch their space with Embark, which Embark was amenable to and an amended space allocation proposal will be submitted to the Board at a future date.

Additionally, I have connected these groups with our Building Manager John Walsh to set up space tours and to start the process for tenant improvements and coordinating the SUB move-in date. Both CJSF and SFPIRG have requested an extension on their move in date due to operational needs, with CJSF requiring more extensive changes to the space. As such, I will need to contact SFU about providing a lease extension for their spaces in the Rotunda.

Next steps are to complete the subleases and letters of agreement for each group to sign. This has taken a long time due to the initial sublease developed by a lawyer did not mirror the motions passed by the Board. Issues around term limits, lack of language around the

institutional relationships, fee collection, etc. that had been removed from previous lease agreements needed to be returned.

## Governance Projects

### Policy Review

After the Governance Review and Restructuring recommendations were passed, and the new policies were approved by the Board, the Governance Committee tasked itself with reviewing all our policies. We realized that with such a massive overhaul that some of our policies would contain small copy/paste errors, areas that did not completely comply with the Collective Agreement, or might change the roles of some of our staff. As such, going over each policy one at a time would be needed. Relevant staff have already reviewed and compiled a list of issues and the Governance Committee will go through them after the Bylaw Reform project is finished, as any changes in the bylaws would require changing related policies.

### Bylaw Reform

As part of the Governance Committee's annual plan, the SFSS has needed to update their bylaws to become compliant with the new Societies Act, which was passed in 2016 by the BC government. Additionally, some areas of our bylaws have needed to be fleshed out (Board member portfolios) or added (Constituency Group descriptions). As such, the committee decided to dedicate considerable time this year to developing bylaws with the goal of passing them at the Fall Annual General Meeting or Spring referendum. Past Boards since 2016 have worked on bylaw reform but nothing has been approved by the membership.

This year, we plan on working with the Council to develop these bylaws so that their powers and responsibilities are not only safeguarded, but expanded, in order to hold the Board accountable. We are also working towards avoiding an omni-bus style reform where students must vote for everything at once, like was done in 2017, and which failed. I ran that counter-campaign in 2017 and was driven to do so by the actions of the Board and its disregard for student and council voices

## Other Projects

### Branded Facemasks

Environment Rep Anuki Karunajeewa and I have been working together to secure 250 SFSS-branded cloth face masks to give out to staff, Board members, and students in the Fall term so we can all stay safe when accessing the SUB. Once the Board approves a quote, we can order the face masks. We plan to do this in early September.

## Transportation Bursary Research


In the discussion around whether to bring back the UPass in the Fall term, we have discussed exploring a transit bursary for some students for an additional opt-out. I have taken the lead on looking into working with SFU to support low-income students with a transportation bursary during COVID-19, specifically with reimbursing part or all of the UPass for the Fall.

I asked financial aid about how many students received a bursary last Fall (around 1700) and we talked a bit about potential amounts that could be contributed.

If similar numbers occurred this fall, then we could reimburse up to 25% of the UPass for 1700 students if we contribute \$75,000. This would effectively give those students one free month of the UPass. If we wanted to increase the reimbursement, we'd either have to shrink the pool of qualifying students or increase the amount of funds.

The downside is that we're stuck using SFU's definition of who is low-income. Additionally, we're not sure how UPass will view giving students a subsidy since the point of the UPass is that it's heavily subsidized already. A 4-month UPass is less than a 1-month 3-zone monthly pass. I will continue to discuss this with SFU and the Board and hope to have something in place in the Fall term.

# PAIN POINTS

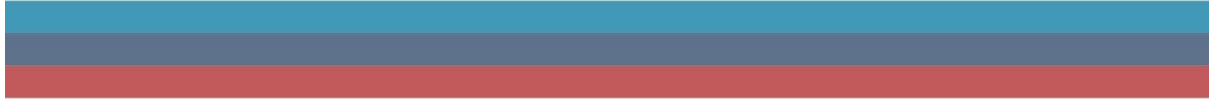


Overall, everything has taken longer than expected and that has caused some projects to be delayed. For instance, I expected the Operations Organizer and Board Organizer administrative positions to have been hired by the end of August. However, they will be hired in the Fall term instead. Fundamentally, the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to remote work have made routine things a bit harder. Tasks and issues that could be a quick conversation in the hallway is now a text or email. An email conversation is now a zoom call. And then there's zoom fatigue on top of that. It can all add up.

The Board approved and completed a significant governance and administrative review and restructuring within the first 6 weeks of their term. This resulted in the termination of five administrative personnel including the Executive Director. The executive board members then took over much of the administrative roles. The extra work has been manageable, but it has taken a while to acclimatize to the additional work and responsibilities. Specifically with my role, I have taken over being the main point of contact for insurance, investments, financial approvals, and the SUB. For the most part, none of these items are particularly time consuming, it's just more things to juggle. Overall, that major restructuring pushed much of the standard Board work (committee formation, annual plans, etc.) by up to two months.

It's not surprising that the Board environment can cause board members stress, anxiety, and even depression. Your decisions can have a significant impact, both positive and negative on our members. Staff, students, and other board members rely on you to be capable. My particular flavor of anxiety is often triggered when I'm tasked with something I have no idea how to approach and where someone is relying on me to complete it well. This often results in paralyzing anxiety where I can't do anything. The medication I started taking in May has helped with that, so that these kinds of episodes happen less. We also have people in the SFSS that I can go to for direction. But, when an anxiety attack occurs, it can take weeks before I fully recover.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



The Board work can be overwhelming due to the new environment that is often very different than a club or even student union. You're required to read and prepare more for Board votes, engage with students more, engage with SFU administration, receive backlash with unpopular decisions, and see how your actions impact others. You also need to do that while balancing sleep, school, and friends. Often at least one of those gets sacrificed. As a faculty and at-large member, depending on how involved you are, being on the Board could be like taking an extra class or two. As an executive, it is like taking two or three extra classes. That's why I always recommend board members treat it like a part-time or full-time job and take as few classes as possible. If you don't, the results can be burnout and poor mental health.

I also recommend that board members talk to each other about their issues. I do weekly group check-ins on our discord channel. I have also been very open about my anxiety levels and challenges while on the board and have encouraged others to reach out if they experience similar issues. Normalizing talking about mental health challenges can be difficult, but it's necessary so that people don't suffer in silence or fall into a worsening cycle. I now take medication to help mitigate the worst of my anxiety and speak to counsellors from time to time, but I can still have bad spikes that can take weeks to fully recover from. That's why I'm often willing to give extensions on work reports or other items with deadlines for mental health reasons.

I also found it's important in this role to take days off. For the first two months I worked six days a week in the SFSS. After burning out, I started to force myself to take nights off. I then upgraded that to taking weekends off. Sometimes I've mute my phone or leave it at home to "unplug" for a time. The SFSS isn't going anywhere, it will still be there tomorrow, and it's important to take time for yourself now.