

simon fraser
student society

**SFSS BOARD
OF DIRECTORS
SEMESTER
REPORT**



Gabe Liosis
VP University Relations

May 2020 - Aug 2020

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Executive Summary

My name is Gabe Liosis, and it is my pleasure to be serving as your Vice-President University Relations on the 2021/21 Board of Directors.

The last four months have been a wild ride. This Board was presented with the extremely difficult challenge of leading this organization through the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, while also bringing strong, structural change that has empowered us as student representatives and advocates to better serve you.

When I ran in the election back in March, I never expected to be doing this job from home - communicating with my colleagues via Zoom. In fact, it was one of the largest challenges I've ever been presented with. However, four months into the job, I can confidently say this has been some of the most rewarding experiences.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed all our lives in ways we never could have imagined. Back in March, "when this is all over" was a fun phrase to throw around. We all thought this would be over in a couple of weeks, if not, months. However, the reality is, this is going to be years of adjustment.

In particular, the lives of students have been impacted greatly. That is why I have been dedicated my time to advocating for students' rights. SFU's response to the pandemic was, and continues to be, inadequate, and students deserve student representatives who will express their frustration and grievances productively through all the channels available to us, conventional and unconventional.

Additionally, COVID-19 presented this Board with a clear opportunity to step back, and create significant structural changes to the organization, which in the coming years, will help build power amongst our student groups, and provide our student-body with ways to hold our elected officials accountable.

I hope you all enjoy reading this report and catching a glimpse of the exciting projects I've worked on in Summer 2020, and the projects I continue to work on heading into Fall 2020 and Spring 2021.

Completed Projects

Governance & Administrative Restructuring

At the beginning of our elected term, the Board of Directors voted to conduct a restructuring of our Governance and Administrative structures. This might not sound exciting, but it is extremely important in terms of who holds the power in a Society that is meant to serve students.

This entire project is split into two components: (1) the Governance Restructuring, and (2) the Administrative Restructuring.

Prior to June 2020, the SFSS operated under a governance model known as **the Carver Model**. In essence, this model delegated all operational responsibilities to an Executive Director that oversaw all staff and operational decisions on behalf of the Board. This model had been employed by the Board for five years, and since its implementation, has caused a number of issues for the SFSS - namely, lack of information or knowledge amongst Board members on how to perform their fiduciary duties as Directors. But overall, and most importantly, large decisions that impact everyday student life were not being made by the elected student representatives, but instead by un-elected, unaccountable Society staff who were not connected to the student-body.

That is why in the first two months of our elected terms, this Board revamped our Governance and Administrative structures that gives the elected student representatives the power to make operational decisions that reflect the will of the student-body. This ensures that student voices are heard, and the SFSS Membership always knows who to hold accountable for Society decisions. We are calling this new model the **Policy-Administrative Hybrid Model**.

As Chair of the Governance Committee, I oversaw a large aspect of this restructuring, which requires a full transformation of the SFSS Board and Administrative Policies. These policies are available on the Society website at all times for the student membership to view (<https://sfss.ca/about/documents/>).

The Administrative Restructuring component continues into the Fall 2020 semester, as we hire new Union-excluded staff that fit alongside this new governance structure. This component of the restructuring is being led by the Executive Committee alongside the HR & Personnel Committee.

Financial Literacy Workshops

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges to students' financial situation. That is why VP Student Life Jennifer Chou and I plan two very successful financial literacy workshops that gave students an opportunity to enhance their knowledge on topics such as creating budgets, and what RRSPs and TFSAs are.

These workshops were led by Vancity Credit Union, who provided us with volunteers who led the presentations! If you are interested in viewing these workshops, they are available on our Facebook page!

These workshops were incredibly successful, and students who attended were actively involved by asking questions and participating in the activities that the facilitators were conducting. This was one of the first online events I helped facilitate during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it went very well.

This workshop helped students further their knowledge of budgeting, RRSPs and TFSAs. It also helped students increase their awareness and knowledge of the SFSS and what we do, as we had a brief introduction to the SFSS before we began.

You can view these workshops here:

Financial Literacy Workshop - Introduction to Basic Budgeting:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MP5pOOzwhrs>

Financial Literacy Workshop - Investing: RRSPs and TFSAs:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFRZN4633YY>

Robert's Rules of Order Training Sessions

Prior to sitting on the Board of Directors, I served on many other bodies such as the Residence Hall Association Board of Directors and the SFSS Council. From January 2020 to April 2020, I served as Chair of Council.

As a result, I gained a lot of experience using Robert's Rules of Order, the rules that govern how Board meetings run. When I started my term on the Board, this experience really helped me in terms of understanding how Board meetings operated under Robert's Rules of Order.

However, for many people, Robert's Rules can be a very intimidating process, and for some, can hinder one's ability to fully participate in these meetings. That's why I held multiple workshops over the course of the first month or two of the Board term, for Board members, on how to effectively use Robert's Rules of Order if you are chairing a meeting.

This workshop was made specifically for the Chairs of our respective Board Committees, but it applies to anyone who wants to learn more about how to use Robert's Rules of Order. One of these workshops was posted on the SFSS YouTube Page, and is available to watch for those wanting to learn more about Robert's Rules.

View the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBcGrIiHoxE>

SFSS COVID-19 Survey

At the end of the Spring 2020 semester, and prior to my term on the Board, the Simon Fraser Student Society conducted a survey amongst SFSS Members on the impact on students' everyday lives the transition to online learning had.

This survey unearthed some concerning quantitative data on the impacts COVID-19 has had on students' mental, academic, and financial health. For example, some of these results included:

- 47% of respondents experienced a heavier workload with remote learning
- 35.7% of respondents report their financial situation prevented them from enrolling in summer classes
- 45.9 of respondents report that they experienced mental health issues due to COVID-19

This quantitative data gave the Board of Directors a clear direction for the advocacy that we conducted in the summer semester. However, due to the unique circumstances of the Summer 2020 term, I decided that the Board should conduct another survey to determine the specific circumstances that students experienced in the summer term.

Questions under this new survey remain largely the same as the previous survey, with some minor amendments to fit the context of the Summer semester. Members of the University and Academic Affairs Committee and members of the Board of Directors had an opportunity to add questions to the survey as well.

This new survey was sent to the SFSS Membership on Thursday, September 10th, 2020, and will remain open for three to four weeks. Upon which time, the Board will release a report on the findings of the survey.

Survey link: <https://websurvey.sfu.ca/cgi-bin/WebObjects/WebSurvey.woa/22/wo/KYCTgryW9aZVpOlmrtgXSw/0.0.0.1.1.0.0.12.7.3.1>

View Previous Survey Report Here:

<https://sfss.ca/sfss-recommendations-to-support-students-during-the-pandemic/>

Ongoing Projects

University and Academic Affairs Committee

COVID-19 Advocacy

The University and Academic Affairs Committee has been engaging in a wide variety of advocacy efforts to create awareness on the impacts that students are facing as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, be it financially, academically, or mentally.

Such demands of the University included the reinstatement of the Pass/Fail option that was offered in the Spring 2020 semester, implementing asynchronous teaching in all courses that absolutely did not require a synchronous format, banning the use of exam invigilating and exam proctoring software, and providing more emergency funding for students who are struggling financially.

In our efforts, we continue to directly lobby the University to take these concerns seriously, and we have been working with the SFU COVID-19 Coalition (<https://www.sfuc19coalition.com/>) to mobilize students from all across campus.

The Committee continues to organize students and mobilize support amongst the student body for these changes.

Mobilizing Students to Push Back Against Tuition Increases

Tuition has been steadily increasing by 2% each year for domestic students since the provincial government put a cap on tuition increases for Universities. Tuition increases have been even more exploitative for international students, who do not have the same tuition cap as domestic students.

In 2004, the Provincial Government capped tuition increases at 2% per year. But the University continues to increase tuition every year, and this is adding up. Not only does the provincial government fail to recognize tuition as an issue, but the University is failing to collaborate with students to lobby the provincial government to provide more funding to post-secondary institutions.

In 2020, the Board of Governors voted to increase tuition for domestic and international students, despite students receiving their education remotely - which is less than optimal for students who are paying for a high-quality education.

This Board of Directors finds the lack of action by the University to reduce tuition appalling. Myself, various other Board members, and few members of the University and Academic Affairs Committee have been working with the **COVID-19 Coalition** (<https://www.sfuc19coalition.com/>) to mobilize students behind the common cause of freezing, and subsequently, reducing tuition.

Our efforts are focused on educating students on why this issue is so important, and what the role of students is in tuition hikes. We are also placing an ordinary resolution on the agenda of our Annual General Meeting on Monday, October 26th, 2020, that the SFSS condemn SFU on its relentless tuition hikes over the years. It is our hope that students will mobilize behind this cause and send a unified message to the University that students will not accept being exploited any longer.

In September 2020, Premier John Horgan called a snap provincial election. I have been working with our President and VP External to ensure that, not only are we fighting for a tuition freeze at the University level, but we are also lobbying and campaigning at a provincial level for this extremely important issue.

SFU Food Hub

Through the Working Group on Emergency Response and Student Engagement (led by VP External Relations Samad Raza), I participated in the start-up of this SFSS pilot project.

COVID-19 has presented several financial implications for SFU students, and residents of the Burnaby Mountain area. The SFU Food Hub aims to provide some level of food security to students living in the Burnaby Mountain area.

Every Wednesday, I helped participate in an in-person Food Hub in Convocation Mall at SFU, where people can register to pick up a bag of free groceries to help them get through the week.

This is a pilot project, yet it has been extremely successful. It started small, with just a few Board members coming up every week to volunteer. Now, we are expanding our volunteer base, and bringing members of the UAA Committee to help with the initiative as well. We also continue to expand the variety of food we are providing.

Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project

At the end of August 2020, TransLink announced it was going to be conducting public consultations on the Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project throughout the entire month of September.

The President and I have been actively participating in a number of events throughout this process.

Firstly, we shared all relevant information and public engagement surveys with our Membership via our mailing list, to ensure that the student voice was captured in these information-collecting initiatives.

Secondly, I participated in an interview with CityTV News about how our Members are feeling about the Gondola project.

See the video here: <https://www.citynews1130.com/video/2020/08/31/picking-a-route-for-sfu-gondola/>

Thirdly, the President and I attended a number of events related to Gondola consultations, including a **Virtual Stakeholders Meeting, a Virtual Open House, and a Telephone Town Hall**, all of which including a brief presentation from the Project Leads, as well as a Q&A portion.

We continue to push the Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project and create awareness on this project.

Banning RCMP Recruitment on Campus

The SFSS supports the defunding of the police and the RCMP and recognize the brutality that communities of colour and Indigenous Peoples' have faced at the hands of police officers, and are actively opposing these behaviours.

In light of this stance, the SFSS has been working to stop RCMP presence on campus, such as at events like career fairs or otherwise. For communities of colour, having police on campus is extremely uncomfortable, and makes folks feel uncomfortable and unsafe.

The SFSS's main priority is ensuring that students do not feel unsafe on their own campus. That is why we set up meetings with the Director of Career and Volunteer Services to bring this forward.

In the coming semester, the Board's goal is to bring this issue forward to the SFU Student Safety Group, where we can work towards making a formal recommendation to the SFU Administration on taking a hard stance on its relationship with the RCMP.

Additionally, we will be bringing up issues such as bias training and de-escalation training for campus security at SFU.

These are both areas of work we will continue to pursue in the Fall 2020 term.

Please see here a Briefing Note that the SFSS President created outlining the SFSS's position of defunding the police:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MDz8VYDRq_9m7G_7pxiEhLyBIGEN40TS/view?usp=sharing

Governance Committee

SFSS By-Law Review

The SFSS has been undergoing a By-Law review for nearly 10 months. This process was initiated by the 2018/19 Board of Directors and will be complete upon the presentation of a set of Draft By-Laws at the SFSS 2020 Annual General Meeting.

I have been the lead of this By-Law Review since starting my Board term on May 1st, through my role as Chair of Governance Committee and the Working Group Lead of the Joint By-Law Review Working Group of the Board and Council.

The Joint By-Law Working Group was the main decision-making body when it came to the by-law changes. The proposals we are proposing at the AGM are as follows, split into four batches of amendments:

Proposal #1 - Societies Act Compliance & By-Law Housekeeping

Proposal #2 - Reform on Executive Officers' Portfolios

Proposal #3 - Student Group Improvements and Definition Clarifications

Proposal #4 - Change in SFSS Power Structures. Council Empowerment.

The largest of the four changes is likely Proposal #4. We are proposing a transformative new governance model for the SFSS, that would transform Council into becoming the legal decision-making body of the Society, empowered to make decisions (as a larger, more representative body), and to hold elected officials of the Executive Committee accountable.

My role has been to take the decisions made at the By-Law Working Group, and funnel them into a comprehensive set of Draft By-Laws to present to the Board and Council - the Board will vote on placing these proposals on the AGM agenda on October 2nd, 2020.

Additionally, I reached out to various student societies that employ a similar model to the one we are proposing, such as the SFU Graduate Student Society, and the UBC Alma Mater Society. Having an insight on how these Societies operate with their own models helped us in understanding how, in practice, a model like this could be applied to the SFSS, giving its history and the direction this Board would like the SFSS to head in.

Overall, these proposals set out to build student power amongst our Student Unions and Constituency Groups and refocus the SFSS on the real purpose of Student Unions. We seek to bring democracy, transparency, and accountability back to the power structures of the SFSS.

You can view all documents related to the By-Law review, including all Briefing Notes, Proposals, Draft By-Laws, Joint By-Law Working Group agendas and PowerPoint presentations related to the project, at this link:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15W4HWiOhmPU5DzNAdHYoIQ_tQHPM94Cu?usp=sharing

Post-Bylaw Review. If the By-Laws pass at the SFSS 2020 Annual General Meeting, my goal is to bring forward a Standing Order to the Board to establish a Transition Steering Committee to oversee all the necessary changes to the Society to ensure a smooth transition to this new model.

This includes researching and implementing new staffing models, reviewing and updating all existing governing documents of the Society (policies, SOPs, Student Union Constitutions and By-Laws, etc.), and implementing strong training and education programs for new Councilors and Executive Committee members, to ensure folks feel comfortable in their new roles once this new model (hopefully) takes place on May 1st, 2020

Lastly, we also recognize that if the By-Laws pass at the AGM, that will mean elections for the Executive Committee could happen as soon as January 2021.

Therefore, select members of the By-Law Review working group are currently working on a draft set of Elections and Referenda Policies that take into account the new process for Council and Executive Committee elections. This way, these Draft Policies can be passed at the Board table immediately at the Board table after the AGM, if the By-Laws pass.

Policy Review

Following the SFSS Administrative Restructuring and Governance Restructuring, there remained a lot of work that needed to be done in terms of updating our policies.

Two months after the bulk of the Governance Restructuring concluded, the SFSS Privacy Policies still needed to be reviewed by the Committee. I made the necessary edits to the policies and brought it to the Governance Committee for recommendation to the Board, which were passed unanimously by the Board.

Additionally, the Governance Committee is still working on minor updates to the Board Policies and Administrative Policies and will bring these changes forward as a batch of small amendments to the Board before the end of the Fall 2020 semester.

Students may view all SFSS Board Policies and Administrative Policies on our website:
<https://sfss.ca/about/documents/>

AGM Planning Working Group

I have been Chairing and leading the Board's efforts in planning the SFSS 2020 Annual General Meeting.

This Committee generally has bi-weekly meetings, where necessary, and I have been overseeing tasks related to AGM Planning such as:

- liaising with our Communications Coordinator on promotional material
- liaising with MECS to ensure we can effectively host our AGM online via zoom
 - This includes having two zoom meetings with MECS to discuss what we need to successfully host our Members' Meeting.
- Determining what agenda items should be placed on the agenda, subject to Board approval
- How to effectively campaign for the By-Law proposals and Tuition condemnation vote
- Creating a script for AGM panelists

This year's AGM will be jam packed with significant motions that will bring substantial changes to the Society. This includes:

- 4 By-Law Amendment Proposals, focusing on:
 - Bringing the By-Laws into compliance with the BC Societies Act
 - Reforming the portfolios of our Executive Officers
 - Improving our Student Group definitions
 - Reforming the role of Council within the SFSS
- Condemning the University on its consistent tuition hikes on domestic and international students and demanding a tuition freeze for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

The AGM is open to all undergraduate students, and will be happening on **Monday, October 26th at 3:30pm** via Zoom. We hope to see you there!

FARM Committee

Creating the FARM Committee

As part of the Board's governance restructuring, we created several new Board Committees. One of these Committees includes the Faculty and At-Large Representative Members (FARM) Committee.

Our FARM reps play a critical role in advancing the interests of the respective University faculties at the Board table. However, there was a lack of a proper forum for these members to discuss their projects.

As VP University Relations, I am a non-voting member of the FARM Committee - meaning I attend meetings and provide support wherever possible! It has been exciting to see this Committee grow and become utilized.

This Committee has a unique system of having a rotating Chair, meaning that each FARM rep will have the opportunity to Chair a meeting. I believe this provides critical leadership opportunities for FARM reps to become comfortable with using Robert's Rules of Order (which, believe me, can be really intimidating).

Advocating for a Senate Committee on Decolonizing Academia

At the FARM Committee, the topic of decolonizing academia was discussed. Committee members mentioned that other schools, under their Senates, have dedicated Committees on stopping colonial practices within academia.

The Committee decided this was an area we wanted to focus on. Therefore, Nafoni and I, as we are also elected members of the Senate concurrently with our roles of the SFSS Board, took on this project. We intend to bring a proposal forward to the SFU Senate on creating such a committee.

We believe that if SFU has a clear commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), that this should be widely supported by Senators and SFU Administration. With the instillation of a new head of the University, President Joy Johnson, we believe this is a great opportunity to collaborate with the University on decolonization efforts and hold them to account where they fail to act on these areas.

Other Projects

Freedom Square Plaque

Students had concerns regarding the Freedom Square Plaque on campus and we wanted to find a way for us to work together with SFU to bring it back to Freedom Square.

For a bit of context and history, in 1967, 5 teaching assistants at SFU were fired, a decision made by SFU Board of Governors at that time, for signing on to an open letter to Students at Templeton Secondary School. The letter called on Templeton students to take a stand for their fellow grade 12 student, who was expelled for distributing a parody of a poetry book criticizing the views of a teacher at their school. 2,500 students, teaching assistants, and faculty members rallied at Freedom Square (the space between Convo Mall and the AQ Steps) and did a sit-in from March 17-20, 1967, to protest the decision of firing the 5 TAs. As a result of the collective actions of the SFU Community, the 5 TAs were reinstated. A plaque was made to commemorate the rallies that took place.

Over the years, this plaque has gone missing, but has always seemed to find its way back to where it belongs - freedom square. We thought that the plaque was temporarily moved for the purposes of renovation and are reaching out to clarify that this is the case.

We also saw that there is no plaque since the completion of the renovation project, and there is now an engraving on the concrete reading the following

"In memories of the rallies that took place in this square in the defense of academic freedom."

We are happy to see this engraving. However, this new engraving fails to include an integral line that was included in the original plaque:

"Freedom Square: So named in commemoration of the rallies held here, March 17th, 1967, and of the students, teaching assistants, and faculty who have themselves in the cause of academic freedom."

In addition to this engraving, due to the history of the actual plaque, we asked that the plaque be returned, and any changes to the plaque be consulted with the SFSS, as we worked with SFU to get it put back in place back in 2014.

The new engraving fails to uphold the key part of the original plaque - unity in students, TAs, and Faculty members. This is seemingly a total erasure of history and unity in the SFU community. There is a history of activism and radicalism deep in the roots of SFU, and this must continue to be documented, reflected upon, and appreciated.

We are asking that the plaque be reinstated, in respect for this history of unity and activism amongst the SFU community. This remains an ongoing discussion with SFU. However, they seem to want us to put the Podium and plaque in the space in front of the SUB, between freedom square and the Student Union Building.

Student Affordability Project Working Group

The Student Affordability Group is a working group of the Joint Operations Group (JOG, for short) that focuses on ways that the University and the SFSS can collaborate on projects that can make everyday student life more affordable for students, whether this be via direct or indirect costs that create barriers to education.

The formation of this group has been a long time waiting, something that my predecessor began. However, this group has had its first meeting and has established some clear goals it will be working on this semester. These include:

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

The second meeting of this group will be on September 30th, 2020.

I look forward to the work this group will conduct this year, and I think it is a great opportunity to take some burden off students.

Operations Organizer Hiring Committee

I volunteered to sit on the Hiring Committee for the SFSS Operations Organizer position, which is one of the two union-excluded staff that the SFSS employs, in addition to our Board Organizer.

This hiring of this position is one of the recommendations that stemmed from the Executive Committee as part of the Administrative Restructuring and the Governance Restructuring conducted early in the Summer semester.

This position is responsible for operations focused work, such as HR and supports the Board in its operational responsibilities, working closely with the President, and the HR & Personnel Committee.

This Committee has met once thus far. We are currently in the process of receiving applications for the positions and will be diving deeper into the hiring process in the coming weeks!

Vice-President Advancement and Alumni Engagement Search Committee

Every search committee for a University Vice-President Executive position requires a representative from one of the two student societies (SFSS and GSS) to be offered a seat on the Committee.

When the SFSS was contacted to ask for participation in this committee, I put my name forward. This Committee was mainly active before May 2020 and took a break in meetings during the majority of the summer.

Now that the Fall 2020 semester is well underway, more meetings have been scheduled and we have been moving through confidential interviews and discussions about candidates and applicants.

The entire search process is set to be done by the end of 2020.

Pain Points

Adjusting to the Online Work Environment

The hardest part of occupying this job during a global pandemic is doing it all from home. Firstly, I struggled for several months to create a healthy separation between my work environment and my personal environment. Secondly, because I was doing online classes on top of working for the SFSS remotely, I find that I am on my computer for nearly the entire day, which has been a struggle for me. Thirdly, it has been challenging doing this work alongside my co-board members, especially when I cannot see them in person every day. I find that when you're in person, it is much easier to stay up to date on what everyone is doing, as well as plan initiatives, because we are always having what I like to call "hallway conversations". Now, something that could easily be discussed for 2 minutes while walking to Renaissance Coffee for your morning coffee now requires setting up a zoom meeting a week in advance for a 30-minute chunk of time.

Burnout

Moreover, burnout is something that I have experienced many times this semester. Once again, I think this extrapolated simply due to the fact that my work/school/personal environment is all in the same place - which has created a feeling I can't quite describe, almost like everything is piling all on your shoulders at once. However, I find that setting aside clear chunks of time in my calendar to complete certain tasks helps a lot, so that I can effectively divide my time between projects.

Mobilizing Students While Online

When this Board was elected, we were all so excited to revive the spirit of activism and radicalism back to Simon Fraser University. However, the fact that we were, suddenly, working at home, presented several challenges. We have had to find innovative ways to mobilize and create awareness among students about issues that are impacting students.

Recommendations

- Have a clear, consistent schedule, that separates work, school, and personal life cleanly.
 - Create time in your day to take breaks (go for a walk, drive to Starbucks, step outside for some fresh air).
 - Try to avoid going on a screen after “work hours”, and try reading a book, exercising, or other non-technology activities.
 - Schedule fun time!
- If you are chairing a Committee, make sure to assign a lead on every project, do not assume responsibility for every project under your Committee, or you will burnout.
 - I recommend creating a Working Group for each project, and assigning a Committee member as Working Group lead, to maximize effectiveness between Committee meetings.
- Do not be afraid to talk about how you are feeling with your family or friends.
 - I find that it is always helpful to talk about your stress with family and friends if you are feeling overwhelmed.
 - Do not be afraid to reach out for further help. Contact SFU Health and Counselling, use MySSP, or see a counsellor.
- Do not overwhelm yourself by sitting on too many Committees.
 - It is really tempting to sit on a wide variety of Committees, but this can be incredibly overwhelming.
 - Choose 2-3, maximum 4, Committees that suit your interests, and stick with those. Any more than that, it becomes unmanageable, especially if you are also taking classes in that semester.