

Dear SFSS executive and students,

We appreciate hearing from students and the opportunity to engage in an open dialogue.

We are aware that the SFSS has voted to condemn the university's 2020-2021 tuition increase and as part of that, you are requesting to reverse the increase. As the responsibility for delivering on the approved budget rests with Administration rather than the Board of Governors, our response here is to address the concerns you have raised.

We acknowledge the immense pressures our students are under, as we are all navigating these unprecedented times. Our students have responded with resiliency and determination, and we are very proud of them.

With inflation and other economic factors, the university's expenses rise every year. The cost of inflation for the post-secondary sector is 2.5%. The tuition increases were part of our approved budget for 2020/21. This 2020-21 budget cycle was approved before the full onset of COVID-19. Due to additional costs and lost revenue from the COVID-19 response, we now expect a significant decrease in income this fiscal year.

The funds gained through tuition and other means allow us to deliver on our academic mission and to support students during their time with us. In order for SFU to cover the costs of salaries for faculty, staff and student employees, committed costs of much-needed maintenance and capital projects, and infrastructure such as IT platforms to support learning, our current budget is extremely challenged.

Our priority in supporting students is to provide direct funding to those who need it the most. An across-the-board tuition freeze or cut provides the same benefit to all students, regardless of their financial position. The best way to support those students who are in financial difficulty is to target more funding to bursaries, which are assessed on the basis of a person's financial situation. In addition, SFU is one of a small number of schools in Canada that disburses bursaries to international students.

From March to April, we offered 3 million dollars in emergency support to domestic and international students. These were students who lost income opportunities, needed financial assistance to find secure housing, had unexpected travel costs or had additional equipment expenses that they could not cover to support remote learning. We continue to support students facing financial difficulty by directing increased funding to student supports, and to bursaries for both domestic and international students. Additionally, the federal government provided funding for domestic students May through August of approximately \$1250 per month.

University administration is also working with the Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) and Graduate Student Society (GSS) to find ways to reduce the financial burden on students



through a newly formed Student Affordability Committee. One example of this work is our institutional shift to digital textbooks and open source learning materials, which has resulted in cost savings for students. We have also waived fees where we can (athletics and recreations fees, lab related fees and parking) to help further offset costs for students. We also worked with the SFSS and GSS to reinstate UPass for students who live in metro Vancouver only, as the reduced cost was recognized as a benefit for those students.

We understand that this is a challenging time, and that COVID-19 continues to place a financial burden on students, some of whom are acutely affected. We are actively looking for opportunities to address student affordability challenges, and appreciate your partnership on this issue. We are dedicated to finding solutions that ensure the long-term financial health of the university, while continuing to provide support for the students, faculty and staff that make up our vibrant SFU community.

Stay safe, healthy and well,

Jon Driver
Vice-President, Academic and Provost *pro tem*

Martin Pochurko
Vice-President Finance and Administration