

Briefing Note: FSU and DSU Space Campaign

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Background

BESU and EVSCSU Eviction

On October 31st, the Environmental Science Student Union (EVSCSU) and Bachelor of Environment Student Union (BESU) announced that the School of Environmental Science is seizing their current shared common room in TASC 7470 to be turned into a laboratory space by the end of the semester. Although the school has expressed commitment to find alternate space for both student unions, this was still done without any advance notice or prior consultation with BESU or EVSCSU. We believe that the university is taking advantage of the fact that students are not on campus to rightfully protest against this eviction happening in the middle of a global pandemic.

BESU and EVSCSU have written a [statement](#) to condemn this decision by the School of Environmental Science. The SFSS Board of Directors have also issued a [letter](#) to the school in solidarity with BESU and EVSCSU.

Students Need Space

To paraphrase BESU's and EVSCSU's statement, a common room is the lifeblood of student unions, and the heart of student life. It's where a student union engages new students, builds a community, and shares a space to collaborate and support each other. Student union spaces also work to create a sense of belonging and can foster positive mental health. In an unprecedented time of online learning where new students are already starting their first year of their university being disconnected from their peers and community, it is vital that Faculty Student Unions (FSUs) and Departmental Student Unions (DSUs) have access to their common rooms when we transition back to in-person learning. A university needs to

prioritize and make space for its students to thrive. What is a university without its students? What does it say about a university if it does not create space for us?

The eviction of student union spaces can be dated back to the 1980s. Common room spaces are always the lowest priority for the university when it comes to allocating and utilizing space. Common rooms are also precarious because there lacks any form of agreement between student unions and departments on how long students will have access to the space. This means departments are allowed to allocate rooms at will and take them back without the consent of students, as this case exemplifies. In [1988](#), the English Student Union found a lock on their common room door without any notice, and in the prior weeks, the Philosophy, Economics and Archeology common rooms were also taken to be used for office space. There were protests, and pushback from the English Student Union (ESU) as well as backing from the SFSS, but ultimately the common room was lost. Fortunately, the ESU currently has a common room but this goes to show how precarious common room spaces are for students. There have been countless evictions since then and now we are seeing that nothing has changed, which is why it is time for students to let the university know that we will not be shoved around any longer. We have seen from the [“Save Our Space”](#) campaign that student activism works in fighting for student space on campus. Students deserve space.

Key Considerations

Current Existing Common Rooms

On Nov 4th, a survey was sent out to all 62 student unions regarding their common room space. The results of the survey indicate that 61% of student unions, including the **49% that are active** in the Fall 2020 semester, **do not have access to a common space or office**, shared or otherwise. Just four of the student unions without these meeting spaces also have a storage locker or room. It is also reported that **11%** have an **office but no common room**, and just **15%** of active student unions have dedicated storage space. For three student unions, this space is in addition to their common area or office, and for the other four, it is their only form of dedicated space. In September 2018, the **Political Science Student Union lost their space** when it was converted into a teaching assistant office. Previously, they shared a space with the History Student Union and the Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies Student Union. Most importantly to note, all of the existing common rooms have no guarantee that their space will not be taken away at any time.

Accessible and Adequate Space

The School of Environmental Science justified BESU's and EVSCSU's eviction, by stating that there were spaces in the new Student Union Building (SUB) for them to book and have their meetings or events. This is not a valid reason to evict BESU and EVSCSU. The SUB already houses constituency groups, and provides bookable spaces to hundreds of student clubs and students, which means that BESU and EVSCSU will have to compete for these spaces and lack consistent access to a shared space to meet the needs of students they serve. Student unions also need storage space to store their equipment. Additionally, student union common rooms need to be in a central location within their departments, to maintain a good connection with their departments and to be located closer to their labs, classrooms, and support offices such as the advising office or the department front desk.

More importantly, the common room also needs to be in an accessible location to meet the needs of disabled students. It cannot be tucked away in a far corner of a department that creates barriers for disabled students, and not having a designated space further exacerbates factors that hinder disabled students from accessing the services and supports that these student unions provide. Lastly, the size of the common room needs to meet the needs of each student union. All in all, student unions need a permanent, accessible, and adequate space.

Recommendations

Council to Write a Letter for all FSUs/DSUs to Sign-on and To Be Sent to All Departments and Faculties

A joint letter from Council and signed by FSUs and DSUs to express the support and stance of Council regarding the common space issue to all faculties and departments. This will provide more leverage for each FSUs and DSUs trying to keep or acquire space by having the backing of other student unions, and set clear demands and expectations across all faculties and departments.

Striking A Letter of Agreement Between FSU/DSU and their Respective Faculty/Department for Space Security and Longevity

Student unions should enter into an agreement with their respective department to ensure that if an adequate and accessible common room is allocated to them, that they have it

permanently, this includes student unions that are satisfied with their existing space. Students deserve to have a secured and permanent space for continuity and longevity of their community.

The letter of agreement should outline the following clauses guaranteeing spaces for a predetermined time, space and location:

1. **Time clause:** The given space cannot be revoked or changed and shall perpetually stand, unless both parties enter into a new agreement.
2. **Location clause:** the common room must be located in an accessible location within the FSU/DSU's respective faculty/department. If the department does not have any available spaces, it must be the next closest available space within the faculty.
3. **Size clause:** the common room must be of adequate size to hold meetings and events. Storage must be provided as well that is in close proximity to the common room.

Recommended Motion

Whereas student union common rooms are vital, and essential for students to thrive everywhere on campus,

Whereas the current eviction of the Environmental Science Student Union (EVSCSU) and Bachelor of Environment Student Union (BESU) from their TASC 7470 common room serves as a reminder of the on-going and real threat of student space eviction,

Whereas a joint effort between all Faculty Student Unions (FSUs) and Departmental Student Unions (DSUs) will show solidarity, power in numbers, and provide a support network for all student unions to acquire space from their department, and faculty,

Be it resolved that Council formally support all FSUs and DSUs to acquire accessible and adequate common rooms on any of SFU's 3 campuses, provide any resources needed, and launch a space campaign called “#StudentsDeserveSpace”,



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Be it further resolved that Council writes a joint letter in line with the briefing note attached and that Council signs as a representative body, as well all student unions voting in favour has their signatures appended, and that this letter be sent to all respective department and faculty within the University

Be it further resolved that this letter outlines that every student union deserves common room space, and in the event that a student union has common room space - that it is the priority of student unions to enter into agreements with their respective department to make sure that this space is secured and permanent.

References

[BESU and EVSCSU Eviction Statement](#)

[SFSS Letter of Support for BESU and EVSCSU](#)

[Peak Archive: English Student Union Common Room Eviction in 1988](#)

[Student Union Common Room Analysis Report](#)