

STUDENT UNION COMMON ROOM ANALYSIS REPORT



Introduction

The Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) is a student-led non-profit organisation that represents and advocates for over 25,000 undergraduate students across the three campuses of Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Burnaby, Vancouver and Surrey, British Columbia. Our mission is to advocate for students, build student power, and provide resources and services that represent, connect and benefit our membership. The SFSS works to ensure the financial health, wellbeing, and engagement of our members. One of the services the SFSS provides is funding, equipment and room booking assistance, elections assistance, and other support to faculty and departmental student unions.

In October 2020, members of Environmental Science Student Union (EVSCSU) and Bachelor of Environment Student Union (BESU) were notified that they would be losing their shared common space to make way for a new laboratory space by the end of the Fall 2020 semester. While SFU is committed to finding space for these students, the decision was made without consultation with those affected or the SFSS. The new Student Union Building (SUB), operated by the SFSS, will provide space for hundreds of students, student activities and interests, and student communities. This includes 22 open bookable rooms that will be available for student unions, as well as the general student population and other groups. The opening of this building will ease some of the space constraint issues for students; however, it will not solve all of them. With over 60 student unions at SFU and new student unions being added every year, spaces for these groups will continue to be a pressing issue. Students should not have to choose between much-needed lab space and a place to build social connections and advocate for their members' needs. Meeting spaces provide students with the ability to develop and foster social relationships, which are key to mental and physical health and well-being, and can even lower the risk of mortality¹

In November 2020, the SFSS administered a survey (the "survey") to student union executives and received 62 responses. This survey asked a series of questions to better understand how the SFSS can support and advocate for student unions with regards to their access to meeting and storage space for their respective union. The following report will summarise the results of the survey.

How many student unions have 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.

What types of space do student unions have?

Student union executives reported that **40%** of active student unions have **a common room but no office**, **11%** have an **office but no common room**, and **no student unions have both**. 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.

Have student unions lost space?

As reported in the survey, 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. Additionally, as mentioned earlier in this report, **EVSCSU and BESU will be losing their space** in December 2020.

Does the space meet the needs of student unions?

Many department student unions **currently share space with other student unions** within the same faculty, such as the Molecular Biology and Biochemistry Student Union and the Chemistry Student Union, and the Labour Studies Student Union and the Sociology and Anthropology Student Union. It is unclear if this is desired or due to lack of space. Some survey respondents remarked that their **space is currently inaccessible due to current restrictions on campus attendance because of the COVID-19 pandemic**. Others, such as the Engineering Science Student Society, Computing Science Student Society, the French Student Union, and the Software Systems Student Society, noted that their **space is currently under construction** or closed due to nearby construction, making it **inaccessible** as well. Some student unions, such as the Psychology Student Union, mentioned that while they have an office, **it is too small to be used** and thus has been **converted to storage**. According to the survey comments, **43%** of student union executives are **not happy** with their current space (or lack of space).

Conclusion

Students are currently facing many challenges, including negative social, physical, and mental health impacts, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social connections will become even more important when SFU resumes regular in-person classes. The results of this survey highlight that common spaces and offices are very important to student unions, where meetings and small events can take place, and work and studying can be done. More storage options would also be welcomed. Student union spaces foster a sense of connection and shared purpose between members, and contribute positively to the social and academic atmosphere at SFU.

References

1. Umberson, Debra, and Jennifer Karas Montez. "Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51, no. 1_suppl (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146510383501>.

Please contact the SFSS President, Osob Mohamed, at president@sfss.ca with any questions or concerns about this report or the survey mentioned in this report.