

simon fraser
student society

**SFSS BOARD
OF DIRECTORS
SEMESTER
REPORT**



Samad Raza
VP External Relations

Sep 2020 - Dec 2020



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Completed Projects

On-going Projects

Pain Points

Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



My name is Samad Raza, the Vice President of External Relation for the board year of 2020-2021. This semester I was part of the University and Academic Affairs Committee (UAA), Chair of External and Community Affair Committee (ECAC), lead of Emergency and Student Engagement working group (ERSE) that operates Under UAA, and Co-chair of Upass Advisory Committee (UAC).

Below is the list of project that I was involved with one way or another:

- Food Hub (ERSE, UAA).
- Spring UPass (ECAC, UAC).
- Tuition and operating grant letter (ECAC).
- Post graduate work permit extension (ECAC).
- International student advocacy office (ECAC).

COMPLETED PROJECTS

Food Hub:

The ERSE working group that operates under the UAA committee ran the Food Hub pilot program in collaboration with SFU, Greater Vancouver Food Hub and Burnaby Neighborhood house from July 2020 to October 2020. The overall program was very well received by students and we received support from students for making it a permanent program.

In summer 2020, SFSS board passed a five thousand dollars budget for the pilot food hub program and we ERSE only used \$1920 from that budget. Most of the cost was from renting tables for the weekly food hub. You can find the breakdown of the budget below.

Total Costs for SFSS event: \$1920

Table, rolling board, easel or whiteboard (1-5 items) = \$30/each

Table, rolling board, easel or whiteboard (more than 5 items): = \$15/each

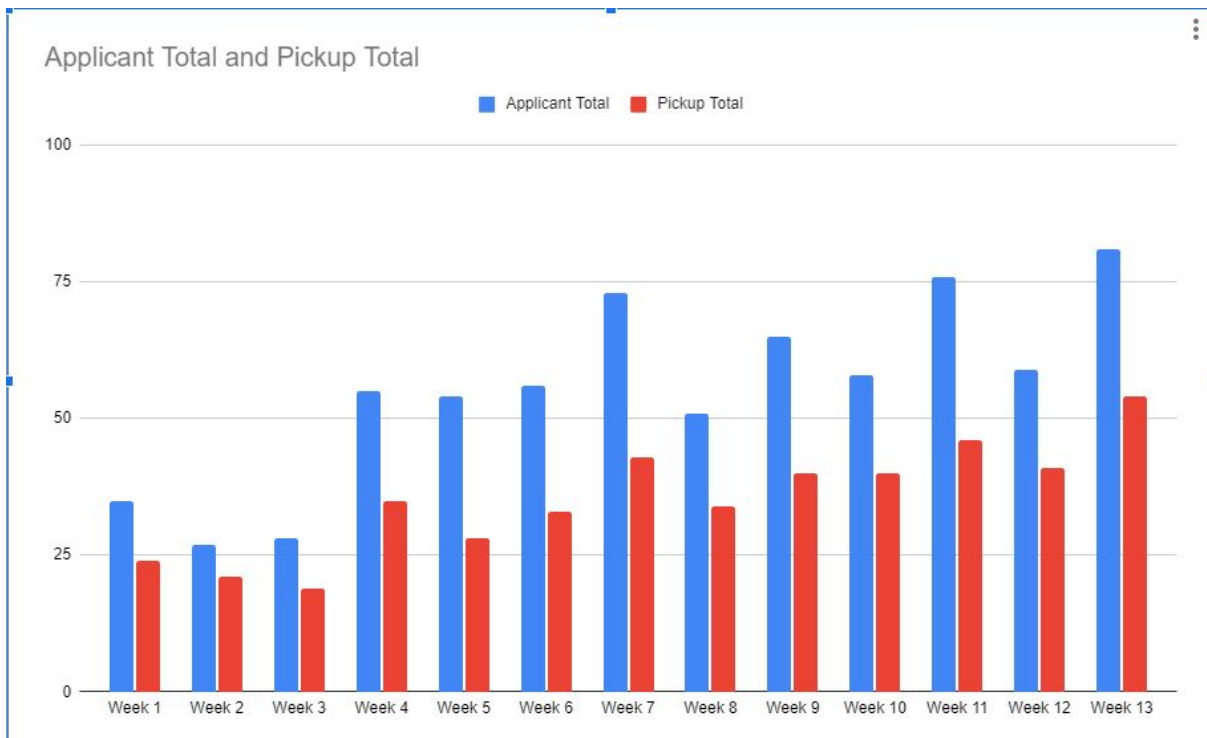
Aug 5, 12, & 19 = 4 tables at \$30/each x 3 days = \$360

Aug 26, Sept 2, 9, 16, 23, & 30 = 5 tables @ \$30/each x 6 days = \$900

Oct 7, 14, 21, 28 = (5 tables at \$30/each + 1 table at \$15/each) x 4 days = \$660

Total for all events = \$360 + \$900 + \$660 = \$1920

We ran the program for thirteen weeks, and on average we had 55.2 applicants every week and 35.2 actual pickups, and on average each applicant was supporting 2.2 household members.



Even though the actual pickup number is not as high as we expected. But, as we can see each person was supporting on average two people, which shows the impact food hub created in our community. We are extremely happy to see that we were able to make a change and help our community in a time of need. We are actively working on the possibility of starting a similar program to help students fight food insecurity.

Post Graduate Work Permit:

In October 2020, I was approached by GSS Director of Academics, Rahil Adli to discuss possible collaboration between SFSS and GSS on the Post Graduate Work Permit (PGWP) extension campaign. The postgraduate work permit is given to international students upon completion of their program. This permit allows them to stay and work in Canada for a certain time and make them eligible to apply for Permanent Residency in Canada. But this permit is only issued once in their whole lifetime as an international student and this permit is also non-renewable. So, when unemployment took its height peak, many former international students also lost their jobs and were left with expiring permits. This soon approaching expiry of permit and losing job made it difficult for them to complete the requirement for Canadian PR and put their future in Canada at risk. So, it was a matter of urgency and high importance to state this situation and help thousands for a former international student from deportation.

Throughout the Fall 2020 semester SFSS Science Rep WeiChun and I worked very closely with Directors of GSS and Migrant Student Union to develop a campaign to get PGWP extended. We started developing a letter stating to all the MP's in British Columbia and

started to reach out to other student unions to gather support for our letter. I also met with MLA Katrina Chen and discussed this issue, to which Katrina Chen showed her support and offered to schedule meeting MP Terry Beech to discuss possible ways to support students. Later Rahil, Mona and I met with Terry Beech and Katrina Chen and shared our concern. Terry Beech decided to support and write a letter of his own to the Minister of Immigration supporting the extension of PGWP. Around mid-December, we finally finished the letter with the signatures of many other student unions and sent it off to all the MP's in BC. You can read the letter [here](#).

In early January we received a piece of very happy and exciting news from the Minister of Immigration that they have decided to extend PGWP for all the holders for the next 18 months. This was a huge win for us and made us extremely happy, we were able to successfully advocate for the benefits of our former international students and secure their future.

UPass Spring 2021:

In the Fall 2020 semester, SFSS received many emails from students expressing their discontent regarding the reinstatement of UPass. For that reason, we decided to bring the matters to the UPass Advisory Committee and figure out the best way to satisfy student needs.

At the External and Community Affairs Committee (ECAC), we discussed the possibilities of changing UPass status for the spring semester. Also, I met with Lori MacDonald who represents Emily Carr Student Union at UAC table and we discussed possibilities of renegotiating UPass for Spring Semester. We brought up many suggestions at the UAC table, such as increasing the exemption limit, introducing new exemption categories, and even asking the Ministry of Transportation to help to subsidise the cost for the Spring semester. But unfortunately, we could not get the exemption limit increased without harming the integrity of the UPass contract with TransLink. However, GSS and SFSS were given to either suspend UPass completely for Spring 2021 or make it in-person only. Which means students who are taking any class that require students to come on campus for their coursework will get UPass and all the other students will not receive UPass. Since SFSS serves over 25,000 students and most of the students are taking online classes, we decided that it is not in students' favour to take away UPass completely and disregard their votes to bring back UPass. So, board members respected student votes and kept UPass as it is. Lori Macdonald and I are still trying our best to work with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and developing more support for students having challenges with UPass.

Tuition Fees and Operating grant Letter:

The SFU decided to increase tuition fees by 2% for domestic students and 4% for international students amid pandemics. This decision was not taken very well by students and this put them under more financial pressure. SFSS decided to put a motion forward in the Annual General Meeting to condemn SFU for this decision. The motion passed with overwhelming support.

Over the decade the government operating grant for the post-secondary institution has slowly decreased, while tuition fees kept on increasing. The government provided a cap on domestic tuition that prevented the institution from increasing fees of more than 2% each year.

Meanwhile, there is no such cap on international tuition fees to safeguard them and that's why every year institution increase up to 20% on international students fees. To state all these matters, I decided to write a letter to BC Premier John Horgan and Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training Melanie Mark to discuss the possibility of putting the cap on international tuition fees and increasing operating grants for post-secondary institutions. You can read the letter [here](#). I also received a reply from the Executive Director of the Post-Secondary System Policy and Liaison Branch, Dean Goodman. Which you can read [here](#).

I also met with MLA Katrina Chen to discuss this matter and tried to get her support. Katrina Chen was very supportive, and she helped set up a meeting with the new Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training, Anne Kang.

ON-GOING PROJECTS



International Advocacy Office:

Seeing a lack of support for international students in many areas such as immigration, tuition, and medicine. The GSS Director of Academics Rahil Adeli proposed a plan to start an international advocacy office in BC in collaboration with other student unions and migrant student unions. This will help the office focus on issues international students are facing and advocate for it effectively.

After a couple meetings with Rahil and Harjab from GSS, WeiChun and I think it's a great plan. But it will require a lot more resources, time and planning and as our term is closer to end. We are trying our best to get as much groundwork done as possible in our term so that the new board can have a good grip on this project. We have met with potential partners from different communities and have received positive feedback.

SFSS Rebranding:

In August 2020, the board created a working group focusing on rebranding the SFSS logo, and the group consisted of myself, Weichun Kua, Jennifer Chou, Haider Masood and Matt Provost.

There has not been any progress in this project since last semester, due to urgent advocacy projects such as Post Graduate Work Permit extension and tuition fees increase. I will be calling the Rebranding working group meeting soon to discuss the scope of work and evaluate our options on continuing this project.

Lobby Days:

Every year SFSS board members go to Victoria to lobby the government, due to COVID, this year it's not possible to travel to Victoria. But we are still determined to lobby virtually. SFSS was invited by ABCS to participate in lobbying with them on the following topics:

Graduate Students

- Permanently establish the BC Graduate Scholarship fund and expand the eligibility criteria to include students in non-STEM disciplines at a total annual cost of \$8 million.
- Expand the eligibility criteria for the BC Access Grant to include graduate students.

Sexualized Violence and Misconduct

- Adopt into regulation the 11 minimum standards identified by Students For Consent Culture under the Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act.
- Renew the \$760 000 to address campus sexualized violence on an annual basis.

Mental Health

- Ensure that students can access free- to low-cost, multi-session counselling through new investments in e-health and other remote technologies, either through investments in the existing Here2Talk service or through newly developed programs.
- Students with Disabilities
- Conduct a province-wide survey on the experiences of students with disabilities in post-secondary education.

Investing in Post-Secondary Education

- Conduct a funding review of provincial post-secondary institutions' operating grants, ensuring that students, faculty, and staff associations are fully integrated throughout the review process; and
- Develop an International Student Education Strategy that ensures that international students' cost of education is predictable and reduces institutions' reliance on international student tuition.

We appreciated their invitation, but SFSS has decided to go on lobbying by itself. We are currently drafting our lobbying strategy and below are the few topics that we are interested in lobbying:

- Sexualized Violence and Misconduct
- Investing in Post-secondary Education
- Cap for international Tuition
- International Student Medical fees

PAIN POINTS



Some of the pain points this semester were the time management, unexpected projects and taking care of mental health. After a lot of hard work and conducting proper student consultation in the summer semester. We decided to bring UPass back for fall semester, but this decision was not well taken by all the community members. Starting September, myself, President, Osob Mohammed and Vice President, Student Services Matthew Provost received a number of angry emails asking sfss to remove UPass charges or cancel UPass. We tried our best to explain the reasoning behind this decision and indicated most students voted in support of UPass. This trend of angry emails started to fade out around mid October, and we started to focus on AGM and other major student issues. This certainly took a toll on my mental health; I believe my colleagues and SFU's UPass administrative staff also felt the damage to their health.

The time management was another big point that I would like to improve on in the Spring 2021 semester. Last semester, I was taking all upper division courses, pushing hard on pressing issues such as expiration of post graduate work permits for former international students and tuition fees increasing amid pandemics. I almost lost track of time and ruined my sleep schedule, which in turn made me seriously sleep deprived. I hope to do better this semester.

Still, I am happy. Because we were able to do so much to support our community and fight for our students. We were able to successfully advocate for former international students and get their post graduate work permit extended for 18 months. We were able to successfully complete our pilot food hub program and helped many students fight food insecurity.

This semester I am hoping to work more on post secondary operating grants issues, student housing and student health.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Health:

In the Fall 2020 semester few unexpected events took place which made me lose focus on my goals and affected my mental health. This semester I am being extremely careful and taking care of my mental and physical health. I am trying to eat healthy, exercising regularly and communicating more with my family and friends.

Time Management:

At the start of the semester I took some time to develop better time management strategies and learned few new tools to help me with task management as well. I am using google calendar to properly keep track of all my meetings and make sure I leave some time for myself. I am using Wrike to keep track of my task and prioritizing them accordingly. So far this new work strategy has proven to be effective and I am hoping I am improving it even more.

Lobby Days:

I am personally extremely excited about lobby days, cause this might just be my last lobbying related business as VP External Relations. Throughout my term, my team and I have been working tirelessly to advocate for students and I really appreciate all of them. Through all the hard work we were able to secure a few victories and we have to get many more before our term is over.