

simon fraser
student society

**SFSS BOARD
OF DIRECTORS
SEMESTER
REPORT**



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Sep 2020 - Dec 2020



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Completed Projects

On-going Projects

Pain Points

Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This semester was filled with many big projects that sought to return power back to the students.

The COVID-19 pandemic and remote instruction continues to provide students with many challenges. By the end of the fall 2020 semester, many students were beginning to experience increased mental health strain, and burn out. Because of this, our board worked incredibly hard to fight for students rights and to make sure that the university was truly fighting for them.

We also sought to build student power within our own organization. We embarked on a massive organizational restructuring, but in the years to come, will see more student involvement and more power given to our student unions and constituency groups. We also hired, and are in the process of, creating and hiring various new positions within our staff to help better support students, whether that be by providing services, or providing support and their activism and advocacy.

The semester has been truly rewarding for me, and I had a lot of fun working on many of these projects. Despite the busyness, I am grateful for the team that I work with every day, and for the students that continue to support us during these difficult times.

I hope you enjoy reading my report, and getting a glimpse at some of the exciting projects that I was able to work on.

COMPLETED PROJECTS



University and Academic Affairs Committee

Movement to Freeze Tuition

The Fall 2020 semester was filled with student advocacy around tuition. In Spring 2020, the SFU Board of Governors raised tuition on students, despite the COVID-19 pandemic just beginning, and students' financial situations were being thrown into uncertainty.

In an attempt to make sure SFU does not increase undergrad's tuition again in Spring 2021, the Board of Directors placed a motion on the agenda of our **2020 Annual General Meeting**, to condemn SFU for the increase in tuition back in Spring 2020, and calling on SFU to freeze tuition hikes this year, in recognition of the pandemic.

The motion passed with a 96% approval vote at the AGM - this demonstrates the amount of frustration students continue to feel by SFU's continued exploitation of students, even during a global pandemic.

This motion generated a great deal of discussion on what the SFSS's role is in fighting for this change, and inevitably, will lead to much larger tuition movements in the future.

Here is an interview I did with CityNews on the topic:

<https://www.citynews1130.com/video/2020/10/22/sfu-students-will-vote-to-condemn-university-for-tuition-hikes/>

More Resources:

<https://the-peak.ca/2020/11/sfu-proposes-tuition-increases-for-next-two-years/>

Open Educational Resources (OER)

Open educational resources continues to be one of the major projects that I work on as a VP university relations. There is the potential for some major headway to be made on this project.

Much of this work on OER is being done by the student affordability work in group (SAWG), which you can read about later on in my report. But I'll summarize below:

To decrease the cost of course materials, the SAWG decided that the best course of action to take was to invest in open educational resources. Myself and our education representative on the Board of Directors are members of another working group on OER, that is run out of the library by Hope Power. Therefore, I have been working with hope to try and boost the work that has already been done by this working group, to provide more funding and administrative support to the already existing OER grants program. This is still underway.

Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project

During Fall 2020, TransLink engaged in two rounds of public consultations around the Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project (BMGP). Throughout the month of September, multiple virtual open houses and town halls were hosted.

President Osob Mohamed and I attended most of these virtual online events, speaking to the importance of the gondola project, and expressing our support on behalf of the undergraduate students.

Round two of consultations were largely the same as the first round, except that TransLink focused specifically on determining which of the [three proposed routes](#) had the most support among students!

The SFSS supports **Route 1** proposed by translink, which was proved to be the favourite choice among undergraduate students based on an [open house conducted by the SFSS](#).

Here is an interview I did with CityNews on the proposed project: <https://www.citynews1130.com/2020/08/31/translink-burnaby-gondola-public-consultation/>

The BMGP continues to be one of the SFSS's main priorities heading into the Spring 2021 semester. Now that public consultations are completed, it is likely that the next step is approval from Burnaby City Council, to recommend to TransLink's Mayors' Council.

Therefore, stay tuned for more updates on these exciting developments!

Governance Committee

By-Law Review

The year's Board of Directors took on one of the most consequential and substantial By-Law updates in decades. The purpose of the review was to determine a series of changes that would provide greater systems of accountability, an organization of checks and balance, as well as a system that provided more representation to students.

Currently, the Board of Directors, a body of 16 members, manages the Society on behalf of our Members (undergraduate students). Additionally, a body called Council also exists, composed of up to 60+ members, each representing a Department or Faculty Student Union or a Constituency Group. However, the Council has very little power, compared to the Board.

I spearheaded the effort to reform the By-Laws to place **more power back in the hands of students**, by decentralizing power from the small, unrepresentative Board to the more representative Council, ensuring that every corner of campus is represented on the SFSS's main decision making body.

The entire process lasted over the latter half of the Summer 2020 semester, and continued through the second half of the Fall 2020 semester. The project was led by the Governance Committee, which itself, delegated the project to a **Joint By-Law Working Group**, which had equal representation of Councillors and Board members.

During the process, we received unanimous support for this new governance model by the Board of Directors, and near unanimous support from the Council.

Over the month of October, leading up to the SFSS AGM on Oct. 26th, the Board spent countless hours campaigning in favour of the By-Law changes - we visited various Council meetings, Student Union meetings, and student group meetings to have conversations with

students on the importance of implementing a model such as this - to build student power.

In the end, it was up to the undergraduate students whether they wanted this new model or not. Excitingly, at our **2020 Annual General Meeting**, which had over 500 students in attendance, voted 91% in favour of implementing the new system.

If I had to do it over again, however, I would do the following:

- Leave extra time to receive legal advice on your proposed By-Law amendments.
 - Luckily, we left just enough time to receive thorough and adequate legal advice. However, too much time never hurts!
- Start early!
 - When taking on a By-Law amendment project (of any size), there is never such a thing as starting too early.
- Strike a Working Group solely dedicated to the project.
 - Initially, this By-Law review project was undertaken by the Governance Committee. However, due to the amount of projects the Committee took on during Fall 2020, it was a lot to juggle at once.
 - Luckily, we decided on striking a By-Law Review Working Group to take on the bulk of the responsibilities, with the Governance Committee steering the direction. I would recommend doing this from the beginning.

Now, with the By-Laws passed, the Board of Directors is working on all aspects of the transition into the new governance structure before its official implementation on May 1st, 2021, including:

- implementing a Transition Steering Committee to oversee all aspects of training, communication, operations, and governance under the new system.
- Reviewing existing policy to be consistent with the new By-Laws

Review of SFSS Elections and Referenda Policies

After the SFSS By-Law Review was completed, a priority of the Governance Committee was to amend the SFSS Elections and Referenda Policies, in order for them to be functional and in order for the 2021 SFSS Executive Committee General Elections.

With the new governance model being implemented, there needed to be clear distinctions in our policies between Executive Committee elections and Council elections.

Additionally, the old policies discussed Board elections, whereas, under the new by-laws, there is no body officially called “the board”, because Council functions as the “legal board” under the new By-Laws - these changes were made in order to be consistent with the new system.

See the [SFSS Elections and Referenda Policies](#) document.

External Links:

<https://the-peak.ca/2020/12/board-shorts-november-13-2020/>

Review of Governance Committee Annual Plan

The Governance Committee implemented an Annual Plan at the beginning of this Board term. (see here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gA4NOY2Jk-JWnjYiVySi_eGjaH_BdfY-/view?usp=sharing).

After the By-Law Review completed in October 2020, the Governance Committee, consequently, had to re-allocate much of its focus to the transition into the new governance system, as well as other major projects. Therefore, I led the Committee through a review of our Annual Plan to match the needs of the transition.

Updated Annual Plan:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gPlZqOFKj7kRVVGPkAh8pfJ_OuaoojtC/view?usp=sharing

The plan focuses on a few key areas for the Spring 2021 term: Administrative Policy review, Issues Policy review, and improving member services governance.

With the implementation of the new Transition Steering Committee, many projects that typically would be under the jurisdiction of the Governance Committee have been delegated to the Transition Steering Committee.

Annual General Meeting Planning Committee

I was designated by the Board of Directors to Chair the Annual General Meeting Planning Committee, established back in June 2020.

The main motions being placed on the AGM agenda included: the 4 By-Law proposals created by the Governance Committee, and approved by the board; the tuition condemnation vote; and other housekeeping business that we are required to conduct pursuant to our [By-Laws](#) and the [BC Societies Act](#).

By-Law Review: The *Joint Working Group on the By-Law Review* was the key decision making body of the By-Law Review project, reporting to the Governance Committee, who had the final say in all By-Law proposals being discussed. Once the final set of Draft By-Laws were completed, they were approved by the Governance Committee, and sent to the Board of Directors for approval and placement on the AGM agenda.

Tuition Condemnation: the initial concept of the undergraduate student body condemning SFU for its tuition hikes back in March 2020 came from the [SFU COVID-19 Coalition](#). This vote helped bring attention to the issue of SFU's continued exploitation of students, even during a global pandemic. The vote received much attention from undergraduate students. See here an [interview I did with CityNews](#) on the topic.

Of course, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the AGM had to be held online. This was the first fully online AGM in SFSS history, so it presented many new challenges. In the months leading up to the meeting, we worked with MECS to purchase a zoom webinar license and set-up the event in a way that was compliant with the [ministerial order](#) giving us the authority to hold the event online rather than in-person.

Recommendations for Next Year

- Start up working group right away, or sometime in June

- Start compiling the Annual Report right away, or as soon as possible.
- Set a clear timeline for everything
- Include Councillors on the planning group
- Give students a reason to want to come, don't just include procedural stuff
 - This is why we put forward motions such as the By-Law amendments and the tuition condemnation motion - to involve students more!
- Send notice earlier
 - Gives students more time to requisition for motions
 - Educate first years on what the SFSS is and encourage them to attend and vote on the motions.
- Strike a By-Law Working group sooner
 - Important to have a dedicated group, rather than just a Governance Committee, working on By-Law amendments of this scale.

External Links:

1. <https://the-peak.ca/2020/09/board-shorts-september-4-2020/>
2. <https://the-peak.ca/2020/12/board-shorts-november-13-2020/>
3. <https://the-peak.ca/2020/10/sfss-hosts-2020-annual-general-meeting/>

University Committees & Working Groups

Joint Operations Working Group

The joint operations group serves as the main channel by which the SFSS lobbies directly to the University. It's composed of representatives from the Simon Fraser Student Society, the graduate student society, and members of the SFU administration. President Osob Mohamed and I sit as the representatives for the undergraduate student society.

The semester we brought forward to this group, such as:

- Extending the deadline by which students are required to withdraw from the course if they seek 100% refund for their tuition.
 - This discussion is still ongoing.
- When wildfires were rampant within the province, and the air quality became very poor, we asked SFU to communicate these safety risks for students more than they did. This is particularly important for students who were travelling up to campus for in person labs or other purposes.
 - This matter was recommended to the semesterly student safety group meeting.
- We brought forward our concerns with SFU's lack of action in regard to the transmountain pipeline expansion project, and a safety risk imposed to the SFU community.
 - This matter was recommended to the semesterly student safety group meeting.
- We brought forward our concerns with SFU's lack of consultation with the indigenous community at SFU on the first peoples gathering house.
- We had discussions regarding the student societies condemnation of the University for its tuition hikes back in March 2020.

Student Affordability Working Group

The student affordability working group is a committee that reports directly to the joint operations group. It serves as an avenue for the student societies and SFU to work on non-tuition costs that are serving as a barrier to post secondary education for money.

During the semester, the student affordability working group focussed on three main areas: improving food security, creating better resources for financial predictability, and decreasing the cost of course materials.

To increase financial predictability, the group is developing an online calculator that students can access that helps them predict a wide range of cost that they might be required to pay if they are attending university. Particularly, it will help students who don't typically live within metro Vancouver, and are unaware of the costs of things such as housing, car insurance, gas, etc.

To improve food security, the group looked at what resources already existed to help students who are experiencing food insecurity. We compiled all the information we could find, and created a resources page on the SFU website to help students access these resources.

To decrease the cost of course materials, the group decided that the best course of action to take was to invest in open educational resources. Myself and our education representative on the Board of Directors are members of another working group on OER, that is run out of the library by Hope Power. Therefore, I have been working with hope to try and boost the work that has already been done by this working group, to provide more funding and administrative support to the already existing OER grants program. This is still underway.

This working group is quite extraordinary in the context of other post secondary institutions across Canada, where it isn't quite as common for collaboration like this between students and administrators. It's

been an honour for me to serve as a member of this group, and to be doing good work for students.

Vice-President Advancement and Alumni Engagement Search Committee

The vice president advancement and alumni engagement is an executive position at Simon Fraser University. A higher committee was launched to fill this position, which requires a student to serve as a representative on this committee - which I volunteered to be a member for.

Over the course of the fall semester, the committee conducted various interviews and reviewed many candidates.

See end result of hiring committee:

<http://www.sfu.ca/sfunews/stories/2020/11/erin-morantz-appointed-next-vp-advancement-and-alumni-engagement.html>

Senate

By the end of the fall 2020 semester, it became quite clear that many students were struggling academically due to a variety of mental health issues that are arising due to social isolation, financial burdens, and many other pandemic related issues. As a result, many students were calling on SFU to bring back the pass/fail grading scheme that was used back in spring 2020.

In my capacity as a student senator, I decided to attempt to place a motion on the SFU Senate agenda to bring back this grading scheme. We organized an email campaign where students could email their senators describing how the pandemic has impacted their academics, and why bringing back this grading scheme would provide much-needed relief for their educational experience.

Due to the amount of students we were able to mobilize, the Senate committee on agenda and rules decided to place the motion on the agenda of the next senate meeting, which takes place on January 11, 2021.

Student Safety Group

In this meeting (which happens semesterly), we expressed our concern for the lack of communication that came from the University on the wildfire that occurred on Burnaby Mountain. We saw this is it safe to rest for the students that lived in residence, and the fact that they did not even know about the wildfire occurring until they saw it on external media. . The chief safety officer expressed that they take direction from the Burnaby fire department, and I didn't see any need for any additional messaging from the institution itself. We disagreed, and suggested that in the future when events like these occur, that an intermediate, yet immediate, notification be sent to students so they are aware of the potential for it to turn into a much bigger threat

Additionally, we brought forward the ongoing discussion that is happening regarding RCMP recruitment on campus. We discussed the possibility of SFU reducing its use of RCMP presence on campus for events such as career fairs. It was suggested that an ongoing discussion is needed on this topic, and that we strike some sort of sub group to discuss this further.

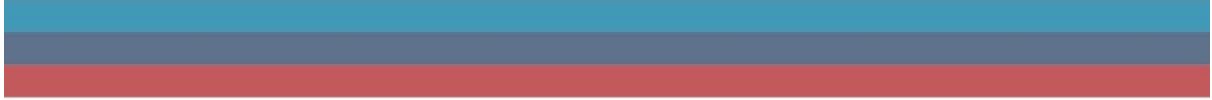
Lastly, we brought forward our concerns around the transmountain pipeline project and SFU's lack of response. There are many significant risks associated with this expansion, including the indigenous people who will be most impacted by this pipeline, and the residents who live near the expansion project. The chief safety officer explained that SFU has always seen us as a safety threat, and continues to oppose the project. Respectfully, we disagreed. However, further discussion on this topic is needed.

Operations Organizer Hiring Committee

I was 1 of 4 board members to set on this hiring committee. The entire hiring process lasted about 1 to 2 months, consisting of: approving the job description for the position, reviewing resumes submitted by applicants, conducting two rounds of interviews, and selecting a final candidate.

In the end, our official new Operational Organizer is Ayesha Khan, who will be officially onboarding starting in January 2021!

ON-GOING PROJECTS



Transition Steering Committee

The transition steering committee officially met for the first time in December 2020.

Here, we split up committee duties into three working groups: the governance working group (chaired by me), the training and communication working group (chaired by Corbett), and the operations working group (chaired by Osob).

The working groups will officially meet starting in January 2021.

Student Advocate Hiring Committee

Jennifer Chou and I were appointed by the Board to be the Board representatives on the hiring committee for a new position that we are trying to implement called the **Student Advocacy Coordinator**, to help advocate on behalf of students in dispute with the university, and protect their rights.

I will be chairing this hiring committee, and the official hiring process will begin in January 2021.

PAIN POINTS



The fall 2021 semester presented many challenges for me personally, simply due to the pandemic. Pain points included:

- I took 4 courses, which was a lot; and often presented issues in keeping up with SFSS work.
- I feel like I took on too many projects at once, which impeded my ability to focus much needed attention on certain projects.
- The online working environment continues to be a bit of a struggle. Not being able to see your teammates on a daily basis is very difficult, especially in a job like this.

RECOMMENDATIONS



- I recommend taking no more than three classes, especially in the fall semester. The fall semester is likely one of the busiest semesters of a board member's term. This was especially difficult because everything is online.
- I recommend taking more mental health breaks. It's important to take these breaks before burning out, not after you've burnt out.
- Consistently add to your work report and semester report throughout the entire term, so that it doesn't pile up at the end.
- Actively try to separate your work, personal, and school life. This is particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic where everything is done within the same room. Very important in terms of preserving mental health.