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**student society**

**SFSS BOARD  
OF DIRECTORS  
SEMESTER  
REPORT**



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**Sep 2020 - Dec 2020**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## Student Advocacy

It has been a pleasure serving on the Board of Directors so far. I believe the SFSS is heading in [the right direction](#), and we have effectively been shifting the culture of our student body towards one of activism and democratic engagement. We've seen an increase of students engaging with our social media posts, and Board members having discussions with general members.

Even if some students disagree with some of the Society's approaches, one thing that no one can dispute is that SFSS is advocating on behalf of students. I noticed an increase of awareness, and hope, among the student body about the SFSS and what student unionism is capable of accomplishing.

## Social Justice and Democracy

All SFSS board voting records visibly tracked on the official meeting minutes now. We are trying to move towards live-streaming Board meetings for increased accessibility. Our mobilizing has led to some solid wins over the year as we work with, and also pressure, the University. It can be exhausting sometimes, but I am honoured and inspired by the change that students make by mobilizing each day.

My efforts have largely been focused on equity and anti-oppression, both within SFSS and SFU. Within the Society, I helped in creating and co-chairing the SFSS BIPOC Committee and being part of developing the new governance structure that is a major shift towards equitable and democratic decision-making in the SFSS. I'm grateful for the opportunity to use SFSS resources to effectively amplify Black and Indigenous voices, which has historically been marginalized within the Society. I also made anti-racism recommendations to the University, many of which are coming to fruition.

# COMPLETED PROJECTS

## Held a Historic Annual General Meeting: New Governance Restructuring

### Summary

The Board, especially the Governance Committee, put in a lot of preparation and campaigning for the SFSS 2020 AGM. The Board was intentional about working with Council on a new decision-making model that worked well for a student union. I wrote an [article for The Peak](#) to summarize some historical context related to the

### SFSS 2020 AGM: Moving towards equity and democracy

*Why you need to attend the SFSS Annual General Meeting*

By Features - October 19, 2020



*Illustration courtesy of SFSS.*

*By Balqees Jama, SFSS Board of Directors (At-Large Rep)*

changes, as well as the importance of this shift towards a more representative and equitable governance structure. SFSS also formally condemned SFU for tuition hikes, especially during a global COVID-19 pandemic when so many students are in precarious situations and our quality of education is lower.

More can be found summarizing the AGM

events, and about students' thoughts on it [here](#).

## Outcomes and Results

- SFSS had the largest turnout since 2006, with 600+ undergraduates attending
- SFSS formally condemned SFU for tuition hikes
- Membership voted in favour of passing all four [by-law proposals](#)
- Council will now be the new legal Board of Directors, which ensures representation from every faculty and departmental student union at SFU
- As members of Council, marginalized (equity-seeking) student groups will also have governance power at the highest decision-making body in the Society
- SFSS established a fully new role called *VP Equity and Sustainability*

## Launched Our Decision SFU Campaign: SFU Athletics Team Name Change



### Summary

The SFSS BIPOC Committee launched a campaign called [Our Decision SFU](#), which was meant to further support the efforts pioneered by Black athletes' to move



away from the racially insensitive Athletics team name away from the 'Clan. While Black athletes and allied organizers successfully pressured SFU to drop the name, we were appalled by the institutional racism at play throughout this process. Therefore, OurDecisionSFU called for respectful acknowledgement of the real reason SFU is dropping the name due to its connotations with the KKK, and the harm the team name has caused over the years. We also called for SFU to uphold the values of the Okanagan Charter, an international charter which Simon Fraser University [signed](#) in 2015. The Charter's two calls on SFU to "Embed health into all aspects of campus culture, across the administration, operations and academic mandates" and "Lead health promotion action and collaboration locally and globally." We called on SFU to support Black students, with specific resources for Black athletes.

## Outcomes and Results

- We call on SFU to allocate designated funding for culturally competent and racially aware mental health resources and counselling services for BIPOC.
- President Joy Johnson released a [statement](#) on SFU Athletics Team Name Change acknowledging realities and harm of the former team name, and highlighted Black efforts
- SFU Health and Counselling started the process of hiring Black counsellor, and made trauma support for Black students available after the violent SFU Alumni arrest in Dec 2020  
<https://www.sfu.ca/students/health/resources/black-students.html>
- Long-term, systemic developments still to be made

### Timeline:

- OURDecisionSFU launched

## Provided Anti-Racism Recommendations to SFU Administration from SFSS Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) Committee

### Summary

The [BIPOC committee invited SFU administration](#) President Joy Johnson and Associate VP Students and International Rummanna Khan Hamani to discuss how we can work together on addressing anti-racism efforts at SFU. Matt and I prepared [a briefing note](#) on behalf of the committee.

### Recommendations from SFSS BIPOC Committee for SFU:

1. **SFU President to release a statement** that properly addresses that the team name change was dropped due to racist connotations and association to the Klu Klux Klan
2. **Respectfully Consult Indigenous Student Leadership.**
3. **Delegate funding to better support BIPOC students. Hire Black and Indigenous counsellors ASAP**, allocate better support specifically for **Black athletes.**
4. **Start the collection of disaggregated race-based data at SFU** through [SFU Institutional Research and Planning](#), where students can self-identify upon admissions. Track the data throughout service delivery at SFU as well.
5. **Establish points of accountability** to develop an SFU Anti-Racist Equity Strategy. This includes **establishing a Vice-President Equity role at SFU** to lead, develop, and carry out the implementation of an anti-racism equity strategy. As an immediate action to show commitment to anti-racism until then, hire a short-term hiring under the Office of the Associate VP Students & International focused on Black and Indigenous empowerment. Their role would include focusing on recruitment, retention, service delivery, inclusion on campus.
6. **Fast Track Hire Black and Indigenous faculty and administration** as has been done in other universities (Example: [OCAD U Cluster Hiring 5 Black Tenured Faculty](#))



## Outcomes and Results

- SFU will begin the collection of race-based data by Fall 2021
- SFU Health and Counselling started the process on hiring Black and Indigenous Counsellors
- SFSS is working with SFU to create the job description and respectfully consult students regarding the new Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Specialist that the University is hiring.
- SFU is considering establishing a senior administration VP Equity role at SFU

# ON-GOING PROJECTS



## Mobilizing for COVID-19 Advocacy

### Summary

The [SFU COVID-19 Coalition](#) (C-19 C) is an alliance of students and workers at SFU that have been organizing during the pandemic for better conditions from the University. The SFSS has played a large role in mobilizing students, working with other members of the C-19 Coalition including the Graduate Student Society (GSS), the Teaching Support Staff Union (TSSU), and Tuition Freeze Now (TFN). We met periodically to develop a timeline for the coalition's plan for the Fall 2020 semester.

### Outcomes

- C-19 Coalition launched a [petition](#) with demands from the University, that now has 1,400+ signatures
- C-19 Coalition is encouraging all folks to [sign up](#) to be an organizer
- We also encourage students and workers to [take further action](#) by contacting local representatives, signing the GSS letter to the BC Minister of Health and the Migrant Students United Petition, and contacting SFU academic departments and University administration.

### Timeline

On-going

## Creating a New Staff Role (Board Organizer) and the Hiring Committee

### Summary

After the Board restructured our staffing, we decided to establish two new positions. Board Organizer (BO) and Operations Organizer (OO). Before the hiring committee was established, I worked with the HR and Personnel Committee in creating the job description. The role of BO is to support the Board in executing its mandate set out by membership. They are to provide practical support in campaign strategy, mobilization, and long-term institutional memory.

## Outcomes

- Hiring process has begun

## Timeline

- Hiring committee struck in October 2021
- Complete the second round of interviews with candidates in January 2021 and hire the final candidate. BO to start as soon as possible.

## Ensuring BIPOC Health and Counselling

### Summary

There are currently many barriers for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) to access health and counselling support. The BIPOC Committee has been working with SFU Health and Counselling to discuss ways to reduce these barriers and provide more inclusive H&C.

## Outcomes

- The BIPOC Committee met with SFU Health and Counselling to discuss the programming we'd like to see initiated to provide culturally relevant support for students at SFU.
- Started the process of hiring Black counsellor and provided Black trauma support after the violent arrest of Black alumnus.
- Long-term developments still to be implemented.
- SFU H&C Committed to establishing long-term, consultative relationship with the SFSS BIPOC Committee

## Timeline

Ongoing

## Amplifying First Peoples Gathering House Advocacy

### Summary

SFU has been [excluding the First Nations Student Association \(FNSA\)](#) from the whole planning and implementation process of the First Peoples Gathering House (FPGH) set to be built in the next couple of years at SFU. The gathering house will be used as a ceremonial space to celebrate Indigenous knowledge and culture. It was even more hurtful that on Orange Shirt Day, a day meant to honour the survivors of colonial Residential Schools, the University chose to exclude the FNSA from the special ground awakening ceremony of the FPGH.

I supported Matt (VP Student Services) and the [FNSA in their advocacy](#). SFU has a history of repeatedly ignoring and excluding Indigenous student leadership from matters that directly affect Indigenous students. My support included: Spreading awareness of FNSA's statement and calls to action online, working with VP University Relations to coordinate conversation with SFU, facilitating the BIPOC Committee meeting with SFU Administration where we raised this issue. I helped FNSA mobilize students to attend the [Aboriginal Steering Committee \(ASC\) meeting](#), where they were discussing FPGH during that meeting and alerted the Peak of the planned action. Unfortunately, and predictably, SFU blocked Indigenous students and allies were from attending, burdening only three tokenized Indigenous students to attend and participate in the meeting.

## Outcomes

- Amplify [FNSA's calls to action](#) and make sure SFU does not ignore their calls
- Make sure FNSA is respectfully consulted regarding the First Peoples Gathering House

## Timeline

- SFU has still not met FNSA's calls to action
- On-going

## Creating an SFSS Podcast (CJSF Collaboration)

### Summary

The Board launched a [podcast titled WTF SFSS](#) in collaboration with CJSF 90.1 FM, our campus and community radio station. Led by me, Jennifer, and Nafoni, and supported by Pariya Zabihi from CJSF, we piloted the project in hopes of engaging with membership meaningfully on student matters. We hope to establish a long term relationship, in any form, between the SFSS and [CJSF](#).

### Outcomes

- We invited guests to discuss event programming, astrology, the importance of engaging in student democracy, and student activism efforts such as the TMX pipeline resistance and COVID-19 Coalition advocacy.
- Through this project, we also hope to support and build a long-term relationship with CJSF Radio.

### Timeline

On-going

# Developing SFSS Black Student Support Staff and Office

## Summary

The SFSS has been rebuilding relations with the Black community, and recognizes the need for increased support and empowerment for Black students at SFU. SFSS Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry (SOCA) is a constituency group that supports and advocates for Black students, providing services and promoting Afrocentric intellectual and cultural experiences through open and interactive exchange of ideas among members of the university community. It is a group where labour to maintain and operate it falls fully on Black students, who are already navigating racial trauma and systemic barriers. As several other SFSS constituency groups have support staff to support, advocate, and facilitate service delivery for their spaces, it is appropriate and needed for SOCA to have a support staff person.

See full briefing note [here](#).

## Outcomes

- Provide practical and systemic support for Black membership. Promote and coordinate community building events that honour and celebrate Black and African heritage and experiences. Provide culturally relevant support for Black students and cultivate a safe, empowering space. Advocate for Black students involved in the campus academic or non-academic processes.
- The Black Student Support Coordinator will be housed in the SOCA lounge as support to Black student membership on campus and asset to the SOCA executive team and membership to shape and implement the annual action plan for the group.
- The functions of the Black Student Support Office would combine elements of different student unions and post secondary institutions Black student support services found across Canada to determine the best services, advocacy programs, and support resources. The Office will operate from the space that has been allocated for the SFSS Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry (SOCA) constituency group in the new Student Union Building. Advocate for Black students involved in the campus academic or non-academic processes

## Timeline

- December: Board approves the creation of the Black Student Support Centre - Coordinator and authorize President and At-Large, alongside the HR and Personnel Committee, to initiate and complete the process to employ a Black Student Support Center - Coordinator (SOCA's Support Staff)
- January: Consult with SOCA
- February: Strike hiring committee

- March: Hire

## Planning Black History Month (Long-Term in SFSS)

### Summary

Black History Month, which takes place in February, is an exciting and important time for many. It is important that we highlight the many Black achievements outside of trauma and struggle, and focus on celebrating Black love, art, and joy. This includes the SFSS celebrating Black students' contributions. The energy we bring into BHM highlighting Blackness should set the tone for how to appreciate Blackness all year-round, and not solely when we benefit from Black folks' labour. I have been working on developing an [Issues Policy](#) in support of SFSS recognizing BHM in a respectful and empowering manner to Black students.

### Outcomes

- Make sure SFSS is practically supporting and amplifying Black student Black History Month celebrations
- Celebrate Black Women in leadership
- Get SFSS to recognize BHM in the long-term by passing a BHM Issues Policy

### Timeline

- Feb 2021: Pass an SFSS BHM Issues Policy
- On-going

## Working with SFU Black Caucus

### Summary

The SFSS Black Caucus (me, President and Health Science Rep) are also members of the newly formed SFU Black Caucus. The SFU Caucus is a group of Black SFU community members - including students, staff, faculty, alumni - that meets to discuss and advocate for all issues related to Black folks at SFU. The Caucus put out an open letter and [statement](#) which recieved 700+ signatures, condemning the racial profiling and violent arrest of a Black SFU alumnus that occurred in December 2020.

### Outcomes

- SFSS actively supports the SFU Black Caucus' efforts in steering the direction to push Black empowerment and anti-racism efforts at SFU.
- The SFU Black Caucus supports Black students who are facing the brunt of anti-Black racism as we do public advocacy.

## Timeline

On-going

## Representing Students on SFU Registrar's Search Committee

### Summary

I am on the Search Committee for the SFU Registrar and Executive Director of Student Enrollment. My role as a student representative is to ensure that student perspectives are heard as the committee deliberates who to hire.

## Timeline

Until Spring Semester

## Establishing SFU Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Specialist

### Summary

One of the recommendations that SFSS BIPOC Committee made to SFU to begin immediately redressing issues related to anti-racism and anti-oppression is to establish a short-term hiring under the Office of the Associate VP Students & International, focused on Black and Indigenous empowerment. Their role would include focusing on recruitment, retention, service delivery, inclusion on campus. Meaningful anti-racism efforts also include the immediate appointment of Black and Indigenous people on EDI Executive Sub-Committee. This would serve as the point accountability to begin to develop an SFU Anti-Racist Equity Strategy until a more senior leader VP Equity role is - which we also recommend- is established. Osob (SFSS President) and I have been hands on with this process.

### Outcomes

- SFSS and SFU are now working together to establish a *SFU Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Specialist*
- We have been providing consultation on how the University can appropriately consult equity-seeking groups
- SFSS provided input on what the the role's hiring committee composition should compose of, emphasizing that there are several seats reserved for student representation from marginalized groups
- SFU committed to compensating students financially for their labour
- SFSS provided input on the job description, and came to a compromise on it that still ensures language around anti-oppression, decolonization, and social justice is included as the JD is circulated.

Timeline

On-going

# PAIN POINTS



## Activism Burn Out

I am an empath also navigating the world with mental illness, and I feel like I hit a wall at some point during Fall 2020. Compassion fatigue can hit hard sometimes as you engage with students and learn the extent of how much so many people are struggling accessing adequate support which seems so systematically doable if people in power genuinely tried to provide.

Black (and hijabi) femmes and Indigenous board members particularly face a unique burden of being hyper-visible to membership, and hyper-aware of power dynamics that we navigate within student organizing. I do find myself burnt out regularly and needing breaks. A notable part of this semester is how vocal Black students, including myself, received vitriol in response to the SFSS [statement](#) in response to the violent arrest of Black SFU alumnus on December 11th, 2020. It is sad to see and experience, but at the end of the day, it is vital that SFSS remains a strong [advocacy body](#) that ensures that SFU's policies are clear and enforced equally. The [SFU Black Caucus](#) also released a statement condemning the violent arrest of a Black SFU alumnus.

## Working from Abroad

Like much of our membership, I have been engaging in my SFU-related activities from overseas due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This presented several challenges such as feeling "socially jetlagged", as in not in tune with my society's schedule around me, making me feel isolated from Vancouver timing as well as local timing. Chronic poor sleep severely impacted my health and showed in the form of chronic poor appetite and fatigue.

## Strategic Organizing and Communication

Being in an online-only environment presents its challenges. While everything is available at our fingertips and we provide updates at Board meetings, sometimes it is hard to track and coordinate efforts in detail if you don't update and reach out to folks to know details of what is going on.



# RECOMMENDATIONS



## Set Boundaries: Go to Sleep at Night

I've learned that I need to make boundaries for myself as I study and organize from a drastically different time-zone. Do as much asynchronous work during the day as possible, and message people and attend class/meetings throughout night hours as necessary. It is worth asserting with folks you work with to try scheduling meetings in PST work hours that work best for you too. Sleep is so important.

## Don't Read the Hate Mail

Some comments, messages, and emails only purpose is to drag you down in bad faith, so don't engage with them. Historically in activism, resistance is a sign that you're making meaningful progress. Black and Indigenous Board members are particularly vulnerable. Let allies know what you're going through so that you're not alone, and they can help take some burden off of you.

## Coordinate Efforts Strategically

Many SFSS Board members, students, and staff are interested in working on the same initiatives. It is critical to check-in with the SFSS [Strategic Plan](#), read other Board members' work [reports](#), and work together effectively so that folks are not constantly reinventing the wheel. This is just practical and increases the sense of feeling like a team. :)

Also build meaningful relationships with other groups on campus to ensure that you have cross-campus solidarity. SFU has a [radical activist history](#) that includes undergrad & grad students, staff, and faculty working together to achieve maximum pressuring impact!

## Make Time for Team Fun

Build team and staff relationships by intentionally setting time aside to engage in non-SFSS related activities. The Board typically feels refreshed and an increase in morale after we play games or watch movies together.