

simon fraser
student society

**SFSS BOARD
OF DIRECTORS
SEMESTER
REPORT**



Osob Mohamed
President

Sep 2020 - Dec 2020



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Completed Projects

On-going Projects

Pain Points

Recommendations

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Completed Projects	6
Annual General Meeting	7
Tuition Condemnation Vote	9
Student Advocacy Office	11
Ongoing Projects	12
Board Organizer Hiring	13
Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project	14
Student Affordability Working Group	18
Collective Bargaining with CUPE 3338	19
Agreement with Fraser International College	20
Board Development	21
Pain Points	22
Recommendations	24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Hello all,

My name is Osob Mohamed, and I am currently the President of the Simon Fraser Student Society. I am the chairperson of the Board of Directors, the Executive Committee and the HR and Personnel Committee. I am also a member of all Board committees, and work with the other Board members on a number of initiatives and projects. I also act as the main spokesperson of the society, working with advocacy committees and SFSS strategic plan to share our messaging with the public. I am also one of two Staff Liaison Officers, working alongside our HR and Personnel Committee and Transition Manager to address labour items within our growing staff team.

Now that my second term as President has come to an end, I am looking back on the previous 8 months and I am both proud of our achievements thus far, and cognizant of how short a year is- and how many things we need to work on in the coming months. The Society has been operating purely offline for the entirety of this Board term, which has been difficult but has also ensured the safety of our staff and student volunteers. This semester has been notably different from the Summer semester, as we have welcomed a number of new students in September, hosted a successful online Annual General Meeting, endorsed and supported a Get out the Vote campaign with the BC Federation of Students and made progress on a number of ongoing projects.

With just one semester left, there are a couple of major projects, such as the Burnaby Mountain Gondola project and the upcoming bargaining of our

collective agreement that I am looking forward to- and to work with and pass the reigns on to the new executive team once they are elected in February. This report is definitely not exhaustive, so for a more detailed view of what I and other Board members have been working on, I strongly encourage you to check out our bi-weekly reports which outlines the different things we work on, on a day-to-day basis. See them [here](#)!

It has been a little disappointing to have to conduct all of our business online as I think it has really dampened our ability to connect with students in person, and has definitely impacted our ability to effectively campaign on different issues in person. My hope is, with vaccine rollout and proper measures taken by the university to ensure safety, that the upcoming board will be able to have some operations in person and be able to finally introduce students to the long-awaited Student Union building. The spring semester will be my last one with the SFSS, so I am looking forward to what is hopefully a strong finish.

COMPLETED PROJECTS



Completed Projects

Annual General Meeting

Condemnation of Tuition Hikes

Operations Organizer Hiring

Student Advocate Office

Annual General Meeting

On October 26th, we held our Annual General meeting via Zoom, which of course was a first for the SFSS. Due to the fact that COVID-19 restrictions have limited our ability to host in-person meetings, the preparation process for this AGM was very different than it had been in previous years. We had to find new ways to make sure that our members would be able to adequately participate in the AGM, make sure to get their votes in, have enough of a student turn out to have the votes that we were putting forward like the tuition condemnation vote and the new bylaws.

We partnered up with SFU Meetings and Events Services, who were incredibly helpful in helping us to secure the zoom license, figure out how to use zoom webinar, and most importantly be able to verify the attendees of the meeting as SFU undergraduate students because we wanted to make sure that the votes were legitimate and that we would be able to actually cross reference to vote once they had been completed. I was incredibly shocked to see the turnout, as the SFSS has had a struggle to reach quorum in recent years. The bylaw proposals passed all with a notable majority and the tuition condemnation vote passed as well. This acted as a jumping-off point for us to continue our advocacy with regard to tuition hikes particularly in the middle of a pandemic.

Coming out of the annual general meeting, I truly believe that we can use what we learn this year to make our meetings more accessible in the future. Oftentimes, asking students to attend meetings in person can be a barrier for number reasons. To have a hybrid model where we can actually have students attending in person and online may be the way forward, and the way to make sure that students are able to come out and to exercise their democratic right as members.

Operations Organizer Hiring

As a part of our administrative restructuring, The Operations Organizer (OO) will report to the President, and provide human resources support to the SFSS, and is responsible for the smooth operation of SFSS facilities, and members facing services at the discretion of the Board. This would include monthly reports on metrics of all services, reviewing and proposing amendments for the annual budget, and other tasks as directed by the Board. The OO would also act as a human resources individual, in providing advice regarding job descriptions, managing job postings, recruiting, training, and coaching administrative personnel, and acting as the primary Staff Liaison Officer (SLO) alongside the President and the Board Labour Committee. Other major responsibilities of the OO are facility management, which includes liaising with SFU facilities services and tenants and member facing service delivery, which includes assisting and training member facing staff, scheduling and evaluating performance of member facing staff, approving grants between \$1500 and \$3000, and other operational tasks as delegated by the Board.

I chaired the hiring committee for the Operations Organizer, and this included scheduling time to work on finalizing the job description, finding time for the committee to meet, shortlisting candidates and working with our Communications coordinator to get them on different websites, setting up interviews, working with committee members to create interview questions, and to follow up with candidates.

We anticipate hiring the Operations Organizer in the early Spring semester.

Tuition Condemnation Vote

The SFSS Annual General Meeting took place on October 26th, where over 600 students gathered virtually to condemn SFU for tuition increases implemented in the 2020-2021 academic year. The vote passed with an overwhelming 96% of students in favour, providing a clear mandate from the student body for the SFU Board of Governors and University Administration to immediately provide a response on a plan of action to withdraw the tuition fee increases for the 2020-2021 academic year, and to address the other impacts of the pandemic on undergraduate students.

SFU students have been calling for a tuition freeze for years, most notably when the university implemented tuition increases for the 2019-2020 year, which saw drastic increases to the tune of 2% for domestic students, and up to 20% for international students. This led to a well attended sit-in at the Board of Governors meeting organized by SFU Tuition Freeze Now, a grassroots organization of SFU students. The Board of Governors members refused to make any amendments, nor any move to work with students to address the exploitative increases being faced by international students in particular.

I worked with student groups on campus to develop the vote question, along with the preamble and presenting it at the Board of Directors and then the Annual General Meeting. As we prepare for the SFU budget consultations, I hope that this tuition condemnation vote will help to set the tone for the conversation and show the dissatisfaction amongst students on the issue of tuition.

The motion passed:

Whereas Simon Fraser University undergraduate students have reported unprecedented financial hardship in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic;

Whereas one of the strategic priorities of the Simon Fraser Student Society is to advocate and push for the financial health and wellbeing of our members;

Whereas the Simon Fraser University Board of Governors passed a vote in favour of implementing a 2% increase in tuition for domestic undergraduate students, and 4% for international undergraduate students for the 2020-2021 academic year despite the extreme financial hardship being faced by our membership during the COVID-19 pandemic;

Be it resolved that the Membership of the Simon Fraser Student Society condemn Simon Fraser University for increasing tuition fees by 2% for domestic students and 4% for international students for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Be it further resolved that the Membership of the Simon Fraser Student Society formally demands a response from the Board of Governors and University Administration on a plan of action to withdraw the tuition fee increases for the 2020-2021 academic year, and to address the other impacts of the pandemic on undergraduate students.

Student Advocacy Office

The development of a Student Advocacy Office and the hiring of a Student Advocate is another project that has continued from my previous term on the Board. While SFU does have an Ombudsperson that students can contact for some forms of support, we felt that our members deserved someone who was fully funded through the SFSS, and therefore would be partial only to the students. We have drafted job descriptions, which outlines the position as one that is a voice for students who need support, and can advocate on their behalf as they navigate through crisis situations in a University setting.

The advocacy priorities and main areas of services include, but are not limited to, support and guidance through conflict, disciplinary and misconduct matters, health and wellness concerns, campus safety, sexual and other forms of harassment and discrimination. This will be a crucial position as students navigate this post-COVID university setting, particularly as more and more students contact us reporting mistreatment and misconduct coming from their instructors in classroom settings. Having to deal with an accusation of academic dishonesty or an instructor who is violating your rights as a student is extremely daunting and stressful, and we are hoping this support will make the experience better for the students.

The hiring committee for the Student Advocate has been struck, and they will be joining us in the Spring 2021 semester.

ON-GOING PROJECTS



Ongoing Projects

Board Organizer Hiring

Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project

Joint Operations Group and Meetings with SFU President

Student Affordability Working Group

Collective Bargaining with CUPE 3338

Agreement with Fraser International College

Board Development

Board Organizer Hiring

As another part of the administrative restructuring, we developed a position (union-excluded) called the Board Organizer (BO). The BO reports directly to the President, and provides support to the Executive Officers of the SFSS. They would work closely to support the Executive in all aspects of Board stewardship. Main tasks would include providing logistical support, serving as a liaison to external parties on request of the Executive, scheduling meetings with stakeholders on behalf of Executives and Board members.

The BO would oversee the Administrative Assistants. The BO would support the Board in planning key committee and Board meetings, assist in Board orientation and training. This includes tracking, monitoring and follow up on the progress of projects; tracking meeting participants, action items and strategies that emanate from the BO's office; collecting and ensuring the preparation and distribution of appropriate materials; and initiation of subsequent follow up meetings, help coordinate AGM, and help as strategic support in line with the strategic plan of the Society.

We are looking to finalize this process after the holidays, as we have begun interviews in December but will have to finish them off in the new year.

Goals: To have the Board Organizer hired

Timeline: Mid-January

Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project

The Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project has been supported by the SFSS for nearly a decade now. Over 88% of our members regularly use public transportation to commute to class, and nearly 95 percent of SFU undergraduate students consider reliable TransLink services important or very important.

In January 2020, the previous Board and University and Academic Affairs Committee hosted a Gondola Open House, in which we shared information and gathered feedback from our membership on the Burnaby Mountain Gondola project over 2 days. The SFSS has been in support of a BMG for more than a decade, and we are thrilled to see the project come so far.

Of the students who participated in the open house, 84% indicated that their preference was for the route directly from Production Way station to SFU, and was considered the most efficient and effective option. The route connected through Lake-City way station was the least preferred, as it had the longest travel times and was an inconvenient option for students coming from the East.

In the 2018 feasibility study, it was quoted that 50,000 hrs of diesel bus operations would be eliminated, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 1700 tons a year. We are in the midst of a climate crisis - and we are seeing the consequences right from the windows of our homes.

Additionally, BMG will cost less to run than the current fleet of diesel buses. It will save taxpayer money (\$35 million over a 30-year period), and the Gondola cost is \$54.2 million less in bus operating costs of \$89.3 million without the gondola. We participated in a number of consultation events, and will continue to push for student interests with regard to this project. During the Fall semester, we have continued to participate in engagements, and share

with students ongoing surveys to ensure that the student perspective is adequately considered and taken into account when making a final decision.

Goals: For Burnaby City Council to vote in favour of the project, namely by route 1, and for it to be slated as a funding priority.

Timeline: Ongoing

Joint Operations Group and Meetings with SFU President

Along with our VP University Relations, I attend a monthly meeting with the GSS and SFU Administration (including key individuals from their finance department, academic department and student services) named the Joint Operations Group. Essentially, this is where we raise major student issues, either to gain more information on a particular topic, or to discuss issues we would like to see resolved. Some of the major topics from the summer semester included issues around exam invigilation, particularly the use of webcam invigilation, Proctorio and similar softwares, questions regarding SFU's reported surplus, and where that funding was being allocated, and issues surrounding student safety during the pandemic.

We have had some major wins, including the suspension of exam invigilation softwares, and the commitments to affordability made through the Student Affordability Working Group.

Fall semester priorities:

- Extending the deadline by which students are required to withdraw from the course if they seek 100% refund for their tuition
- Better communication from SFU when it comes to emergencies, such as the wildfires that happen, which was also discussed at the Student Safety Group
- Provided a presentation regarding SFU's opposition to the Trans Mountain Expansion project, and pushed the University to make commitment to strongly oppose the project publicly
- SFU's lack of consultation with the Indigenous communities at SFU on the development of the First People's Gathering House

- Tuition Hikes in the 2021-2022 budget draft, and particularly looking into areas of budget surplus, which SFU could utilize to balance their budget without imposing additional tuition hikes on students.

Goals: To gather key information, and push for student interests to decision makers at SFU

Timeline: Ongoing

Student Affordability Working Group

The Student Affordability Working Group is made up of representatives from the GSS, and SFU Administration, and is a working group of JOG. The premise of the groups is to examine some of the areas where we can collaborate to relieve financial burdens from students, and give them the opportunity to make everyday life a little more affordable. We are preparing a press release for the SFU community, to inform them of the purpose of the group, and to share about the topics we've decided to tackle first. The SFSS has already committed to food security and Open Education Resource (OER) projects, and we are hoping to be able to gain additional support on them through this committee, while also working with the GSS and University to explore new avenues for cost-savings.

1. Food Security
2. Open Educational Resources and Course Material Costs
3. Financial Predictability

Goals: To develop tools and resources to relieve students of non-tuition related financial burdens

Timeline: Ongoing

Collective Bargaining with CUPE 3338

The unionized employees of the SFSS are represented by CUPE 3338- and the Board of Directors act as their employer. Our collective agreement acts as a contract between the employer and employee, and has been expired since 2019. One of our priorities this year is to renegotiate the collective agreement, and to develop a long lasting agreement that will improve the relationship with employees.

Currently, we are working on reviewing the CA we have, and looking into areas of potential improvement. We want to have proposals prepared for the early Spring semester, which will allow us ample time to engage in the bargaining process. As a part of our Board development, I've been planning some sessions on labour organizing, collective agreements, and what the Board's responsibility will be during this process. As we move into a new building and a new era for the SFSS, I am truly looking forward to this process.

Goals: To develop bargaining proposals and begin bargaining, and ratify a new agreement

Timeline: Before the end of the Spring semester

Agreement with Fraser International College

The Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) Board of Directors approved an agreement that has seen the SFSS provide a broad range of service and support for students attending Fraser International College (FIC), since January 2nd, 2019. The recommendation to review a potential partnership originated from Council in May 2017. The original agreement was slated to last 2 years, and this year we have focused our efforts on the renegotiating of the agreement.

Corbett (VP Finance) and I have met with Sharla Reid, FIC Principal, to discuss the current agreement. While we cannot comment on ongoing negotiations, we want to continue to provide FIC students with the services they need to succeed, and transition to SFU in the future. We have also been exploring the idea of providing FIC members with associate membership within the SFSS, and the new SFSS Bylaw structure will allow for this. Long term plans include a potential referendum question to ask FIC students if they are interested in associate SFSS membership, which would provide them with the same rights and services as full SFSS members.

Goals: Sign a renegotiated agreement, and put associate membership onto a referendum.

Board Development

Summary: As the President, one of my duties has been to coordinate Board Development Sessions for each alternating week (when we don't have Board meetings), and find facilitators to support us with different projects, or work with the VPs to host sessions that relate to their particular portfolios. So far, we have had sessions with Health and Counselling Services, SFPIRG, the Indigenous Student Centre, Tom Abbott NPC (support with strategic planning), and more. We will be having more development sessions for the Spring semester that are relevant to our growth as Board members, and in gaining that knowledge will allow us to better serve our students. Some areas where we are looking to explore include sustainability, digital organizing, and racial justice and equity.

I am hoping we can partner with some local organizations to help us facilitate some sessions, particularly leading up to bargaining our new Collective Agreement, and with preparations on upcoming lobby days.

Goals: Hosting bi-weekly sessions to support Board members in effectively executing their portfolios by developing key skills

Timeline: Ongoing

PAIN POINTS



Pain Points

1. Communication during an all-online term

Due to the pandemic, having to communicate nearly exclusively online has added a barrier, which when you're trying to liaise with 15 other people can become very overwhelming. A few times during the semester, I try to set up time to communicate with faculty and at-large reps in "check-ins". While I do review work reports and have an understanding of what goes on, it's still hard to keep up with at times. I will continue to work on ensuring that tasks that are not under my specific purview are delegated out to the other board members, and not just the VPs as I fear overburdening them as many have their own portfolio pieces to oversee at any given time. We have been having monthly socials for the Board to enjoy and spend time together, and we have a Discord channel which has been a great medium for us and students at-large on our committees to keep in constant contact with.

2. Burnout

Being a board executive is very different from my last year with the SFSS, with regard to the duties and responsibilities I have to keep an eye on, on a daily basis. I am working on better allocating my time to find ways to wind down, as the SFSS can really become all-consuming at times. It's an interesting situation, considering that as a board member, I do see it as my responsibility to be available to students whenever they may need, but for my own sake it makes sense to take some time away every now and then I've begun to mute my

social medias during some hours on the weekend, and it has helped a lot. Try to find that balance for yourself, the earlier the better

3. Staff relations

As the President, I directly oversee union-excluded staff. This has been a very new experience for me, and I certainly have learned a lot in what it means to be an “employer”. As someone who has been an employee for most of my life, in all other jobs I’ve had, it has certainly been a transition and learning experience rather than a pain point. I am very grateful for our hardworking and trustworthy staff, who have certainly made this experience easier for me.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations

1. Set time aside for schoolwork, life-stuff, and other responsibilities in a way that will not interfere with SFSS work. I have been fortunate to be able to enroll in asynchronous courses, which allows me better flexibility in meeting setting times, but I recognize this will not always be possible. Try to limit the amount of courses you take, or even take some time off from school work if possible.
2. Keep up with emails! I still struggle with this one, and have made a point to go through and clean up my emails every few hours during the working day and between meetings, which has helped a lot. When they pile up, it can get overwhelming and you may run the risk of missing something important.
3. Communicate with students. As members, you have a responsibility to students to make yourself available to discuss. I find that office-hours don't work as well online, but I have been able to set time aside during my days to discuss different issues with students (even on the weekends), and try to make myself as open and available as possible.