

2020-2021



**simon fraser**  
**student society**

# AT-LARGE REP'S EXIT REPORT

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**Balqees Jama**

Simon Fraser Student Society

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Photo: Me wearing a dark-green, Don't Evict Students 2019 scarf made by SFPIRG (with button pins) in protest of Rotunda Groups evictions. See space campaign timeline [here](#).

The pins read:

**Tuition Freeze Now**

**Educate, Agitate, Organize (made by SFSS Women's Centre)**

**Campus Superhero SFPIRG**

**Put SOCA in the SUB, #SAVESOCA, [#BlackSpacesMatter](#)**

**I Care about Racial Justice! That's why I need SFPIRG**





## Executive Summary

Dear students, thank you for trusting me to represent you this year. I ran on an ambitious platform based on building student activism as part of the SFU Progressives this year. I have certainly witnessed a shift in student culture at Simon Fraser University, where debate, engagement, and advocacy have all increased.

One goal we made significant improvements on this year is making our Student Society more easily accessible for students from all kinds of backgrounds to benefit from. As a member of the Governance Committee, I played a part in developing the newly adopted governance structure. I also helped drive the campaigning and mobilizing part of the historic 2020 Annual General Meeting, in which we got 600+ students participating; this was the highest turnout in 14 years (2006) for the SFSS to ensure that the union has an anti-oppressive and democratic way of decision making within the student body.

Another major achievement of this year is that I managed to strongly emphasize to the Administration and other SFU bodies the importance of student consultation, especially with marginalized students. I have been vocal about how the marginalization of students is a direct result of being excluded from the initial process of policy creation. While progress can feel slow sometimes, there has been significant improvement in the consultation process of equity groups on campus. This is a direct result of the groups advocating, as well as me, and namely Osob Mohamed (President), Gabe Liosis (VP University Relations), and Mather Provost (VP Student Services) using SFSS resources to amplify their concerns and calls to action. With our pressure and guidance, SFU has become noticeably better at reaching out to students. I do understand, however, that this will easily stop being the case if students stop holding the University accountable.

I am proud and relieved that I helped drive the developments of SFSS Issues Policies and the Black Student Support Centre. The [Issues Policies](#) institutionalized our student union's approach to social justice when it comes to financial, socio-political, and academic advocacy relating to student life and post-secondary education that are important to the SFSS membership. I wrote the policies on Black History Month and Anti-Racism with the support of Black, Indigenous, and Students Of Colour; I helped directly with policies on Living Wage & Union Rights as well as Police and Militarization. I am thankful for the undergrad students who came together to work on these, and I'm happy to have helped coordinate the efforts.

I worked effectively with many parties to achieve significant wins for students. This list includes: undergraduate and graduate students, the Board of Directors, grassroots organizers and groups, mentors, as well as SFU staff, faculty, and administration.

A fun highlight of the year that I will always cherish is [The Peak](#) memorializing a cartoon of me on the front cover of the paper for the [Annual General Meeting Issue](#)! Apparently, I'm illustrated sitting on the very right side.

*From left to right: Osob Mohamed (President), Matt Provost (VP Student Services), Jennifer Chou (VP Student Life), Gabe Liosis (VP University Relations), and me (At-Large Rep).*



*The Peak | AGM 2020 Issue*

## How I Got Involved in Student Activism

I initially heard of the SFSS when they attempted to evict the Black student group and other Rotunda Community groups from campus. Till now, I am still a member of the Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry (SOCA). Students [successfully organized](#) to resolve the space issue, and I built many coalitions and relationships along the way. The space campaign was when I truly realized the importance of using institutional resources to empower the most vulnerable students. The solidarity with other students and groups also made me learn the value of building alliances, and standing in solidarity with one another's inter-connected causes. I wrote [an article](#) for the SFU's independent student paper on recent SFU student activism, attacks on democracy, and our student union's move towards equity and democracy. You can find an extensive collection of historical data of the *Black Spaces Matter* and *Save Our Spaces* campaigns on [SFU SOCA's website](#).



[Tuition Freeze Now](#) Rally, 2019





*Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry (SOCA) Social Event, 2020*

## Reflections

The culture at SFU [has shifted](#) significantly towards one of student activism, and I expect that the student movement will grow. The University now expects that SFSS will advocate for the best interest of students. SFU does not have to like us, but they do need to respect us. While there are certainly tough times, it has been a rewarding honour to be part of this successful student movement.

Behind everything I know, are my parents, aunts, educators, and mentors who have invested their time and energy in me. I am grateful for the many people who supported me along this journey: students, the [SFU Progressives](#) student party (including last year's SFSS Progressive Caucus), grassroots organizers, supportive SFU community members, my friends and family. I'm honoured to be trusted by the Black community. I will forever cherish the love and care I've found within the *SFU Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry* ([SOCA](#)), as well as the *SFU Somali Student Association* ([SSA](#)). Alhamdulillah.

Shoutout to Black women. ❤️



## Overview

My role as an At-Large Representative was a flexible one, as my role did not have a set portfolio like other Board positions do. This meant I had the opportunity to create my own projects, support grassroots student initiatives, assist other Board members as needed, and respond to spontaneous and time-sensitive matters involving students. I played a large role in coordinating campaign efforts of the Board and mobilizing students and workers at SFU.

## Equity Advocacy

My focus this year was primarily on advocating and mobilizing for anti-oppressive policies and practices within both the student society and the University. Here is a general summary of how I spent my time, energy, and available Society resources during my year on the SFSS Board of Directors:

- Wrote equitable SFSS by-laws and policies that reflect the Society's massive governance structural changes as well as new Issues Policies, which laid a foundation for democratic student governance and student power movement building
- Established and co-chaired the inaugural SFSS Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) Committee
- Coordinated and/or supported a variety of campaigns to empower students, and mobilized the SFU community
- Consulted and worked with marginalized students and equity-seeking constituency groups to help inform SFSS policy development and direction of advocacy
- Met with SFU Administration to discuss issues and tangible actions to alleviate systemic barriers for marginalized students; Worked effectively together on successful student-empowering initiatives, and held them accountable to what must be improved for students wellbeing
- Provided consultation to SFU Administration and Student Services on anti-racist policies, practices, and procedures
- Established a SFSS Black Student Support Centre (BSSC) in collaboration with SFU Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry (SOCA)
- Supported initiatives and calls to action led by the First Nations Students Association (FNSA)
- Highlighted Black and Indigenous student issues, and worked to increase racially and culturally appropriate accessible resources at the University

- Built coalitions, alliances, and solidarity with advocacy groups, which included many students, workers, and grassroots organizers



**SFSS completes successful first year working remotely during a global pandemic**

*Board of Directors Meeting*

## Challenges & Learning Experiences

### Proactiveness and Coordination

Strategizing and then actually mobilizing is a challenging, but fun, task. A key part of organizing is genuinely connecting with people on some level, and then following up on conversations or action items. It is also important to highlight and draw on everyone's unique strengths. When they do good work, affirm their labour verbally. When it comes to Board meetings, you must read all documents and know what you want to mainly speak on prior to the start of the meeting. Feeling prepared makes you more confident in the knowledge you have on the issue and also makes it easier to request clarification. Remember that you were elected to represent your constituency and they put their trust in your vote.





### **Clashes with Teammates**

If people are working together towards a cause, we owe it to each other that we all intend to achieve the best outcome for students. Sometimes you simply disagree with Board members and other SFSS undergrad students. Other times, conflicts are more serious, where teammates may not recognize the harmful impact their visions, decisions, or methods could have on students. It's important to focus on the impact as you discuss these issues, and not the person's intentions or character. I've learned that something really helpful is to regularly ask "*why*" about something you disagree with, because that digs deep into the root motivation. Once you figure that part out, you can often work together on an agreeable solution.

### **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. I found that calling with teammates to work quietly at the same time on different projects was helpful to keeping me motivated. While it's not the same as being in person, calls allow for small talk that would normally happen when working together. Other times, calling to check in about how life is going or simply hanging out has been a morale booster for me.

### **Energy is a Limited Resource**

People often say that they don't have time for something, when in reality, it's more that they do not have capacity for it. Working from a vastly different time zone affects my organizing efforts, social life and health. I've had to learn how to set more boundaries for myself, and say no to things. After feeling extremely burnt out halfway through the year, I made a conscious decision to focus my efforts on areas I knew others would not. There are areas that historically do not receive adequate attention, priority, or funding within institutions, including SFSS and SFU. Compassion fatigue can hit hard sometimes as you engage with students and learn the extent of how much so many people are struggling to access adequate support; support that seems so systematically possible to provide if people in power genuinely prioritized it.



## Vulnerability of Black and Indigenous Organizers

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 was burnt out regularly and needed breaks from doing extra unseen labour that members of marginalized communities often are forced to undertake in organizing spaces. Other times, I needed breaks from the toxicity or harassment I receive from members of the community at large.

A notable part of this year is how vocal Black students, including myself, received vitriol in response to the SFSS [statement](#) responding 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.

At an SFU Black Caucus meeting that occurred one day before the report was released, SFU President Joy Johnson stated that she agreed with Black activists and community groups that the results of the MacKay report highlights concerns as to how current policies and procedures at SFU even allowed for escalation to such violence on campus. While I'm glad that it is recognized by the Administration, the SFU community at large has seen snail-paced movement on steps to redress oppressive and [racist campus](#) safety methods.

## Key Contacts

This is a non-exhaustive list of public email and social media contacts at SFU that I collaborated with to achieve successful outcomes for students this year.

| Name                | Role, Affiliation   | Contact Information   |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Gabe Liosis         | VP Student Services (and incoming President 2021-22), SFSS Governance Committee Chair       | <a href="mailto:vpuniversity@sfss.ca">vpuniversity@sfss.ca</a><br><a href="mailto:president@sfss.ca">president@sfss.ca</a><br>Twitter:<br><a href="https://twitter.com/gabeliosis">https://twitter.com/gabeliosis</a> |
| Marie Hadded        | SFU Undergraduate Activist, incoming inaugural SFSS VP Equity & Sustainability 2021-22      | <a href="mailto:vpequity@sfss.ca">vpequity@sfss.ca</a><br>Twitter:<br><a href="https://twitter.com/mreehad">https://twitter.com/mreehad</a>   |
| Corbett Gildersleve | VP Finance (and incoming VP Internal and Organizational Development 2021-22)                | <a href="mailto:vpfinance@sfss.ca">vpfinance@sfss.ca</a><br><a href="mailto:vpinternal@sfss.ca">vpinternal@sfss.ca</a>  |
| FNSA Members        | SFU First Nations Students Association (FNSA)   | <a href="mailto:fnsa-board@sfss.ca">fnsa-board@sfss.ca</a>  |
| Monique Leslie      | Acting-President, SFU Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry (SOCA)                     | <a href="mailto:sfusoca@gmail.com">sfusoca@gmail.com</a>  |
| DNA Members         | SFU Disability and Neurodiversity Alliance (DNA)  | <a href="mailto:sfudna@gmail.com">sfudna@gmail.com</a>  |
| Chantelle Spicer    | Solidarity and Social Justice Commissioner, Teaching Support Staff Union (TSSU)             | <a href="mailto:ssjc@tssu.ca">ssjc@tssu.ca</a>  |
| Hafsa Sadiq         | Director of Equity, SFU Graduate Student Society (GSS)                                      | <a href="mailto:dae@sfugradsociety.ca">dae@sfugradsociety.ca</a>  |
| Gabby Doebelli      | Director of Engagement, Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group (SFPIRG)                | <a href="mailto:engagement@sfpirg.ca">engagement@sfpirg.ca</a>  |
| Martin Mroz         | Director, SFU Health & Counselling  | <a href="mailto:martin_mroz@sfu.ca">martin_mroz@sfu.ca</a><br>Phone: 778.782.3692   |
| Erin Biddlecombe    | Senior Director, Office of the Vice-Provost, Students & International, SFU Student Services | <a href="mailto:erinb@sfu.ca">erinb@sfu.ca</a><br>Phone: 778-782-9013   |
| Tony Botelho        | Director, SFU Career & Volunteer Services   | <a href="mailto:botelho@sfu.ca">botelho@sfu.ca</a>  |
| June Francis        | Professor, member of the SFU Black Caucus   | <a href="mailto:blackcaucus-contact@sfu.ca">blackcaucus-contact@sfu.ca</a>  |

## Projects and Initiatives

### Summer 2020

#### Led the SFU COVID-19 Coalition Town Hall

##### Summary

I played a major organizing role among the students & workers at SFU mobilizing for real academic and financial support through the COVID-19 crisis. We formed the [COVID-19 Coalition](#), and demanded immediate relief for those most affected: international students and workers. The C-19 Coalition is made up of members of the SFSS, Graduate Student Society (GSS, TFN, and TSSU). I proposed and coordinated a C-19 Coalition Town Hall in efforts of meaningfully engaging with the community. I organized the logistics of this type of online event we were doing for the first time, coordinated between panelists and volunteers, promoted the event, and also moderated the event.

#### **SFU COVID-19 Coalition**



We [live-streamed the town hall on](#) Facebook, where it reached 6,000+ views as well as media coverage. It was a major success, and helped to inform the direction of advocacy for the SFSS.

##### Outcomes and Results

- SFSS organized a C-19 Coalition town hall, live streamed and open to all
- Students and workers vocalized concerns
- Everyone more informed about advocacy efforts issues

Date Completed: June 7, 2020



## Implemented Administrative Restructuring Model and Board Policies Restructuring

This was an ambitious project that the Governance Committee took on during our first semester. The review of the governance model led to a recommendation on a new governance model that stipulated the composition and structure of the policies, and what the relationship between these policies and Staff, Board, the Executive Committee and the union-excluded support staff is. In line with this recommendation, we reviewed the old policies. We also reviewed the older 2015 Policy Manual ascertaining the appropriateness of adopting some of the old policies from the 2015 Policy Manual.

More details and supporting documents on this restructuring can be found [here](#) in the minutes.

### Outcome and Results

- We researched, developed, and implemented an administrative restructuring model, on the recommendations of both the Governance Committee and Executive Committee. We also made sure to update and implement our SFSS policies to reflect that.
- Throughout the rest of the year, students and staff of the SFSS were able to collaborate much more effectively once we adopted a model more appropriate for the purposes of a student society, which I played a significant role in supporting successful SFSS initiatives this year.

## Contributed to Black in BC Community Emergency Support Fund

I put forward a successful motion for [SFSS to contribute \\$3,000 to the Black in BC Community Support Fund](#) for COVID-19. The fund is meant to support Black people who cannot receive federal or provincial support like the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), including students. CERB provided financial support to employed and self-employed Canadians who were directly affected by COVID-19. Many people were in precarious situations, yet were not considered eligible to have received \$2,000 for a 4-week period (the same as \$500 a week). The donation to the Black in BC Community Support Fund for COVID-19 is in solidarity with Black lives that have been disproportionately and systemically affected by the pandemic that put them in even vulnerable positions.

## Submitted SFSS Just Recovery Brief on Canada's COVID-19 Response to the House of Commons

I got the SFSS to officially endorse the Just Recovery Principles, and I submitted a brief regarding Canada's COVID-19 response to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.



*Just Recovery* is a call to the Canadian government to acknowledge that we cannot go “back to normal” as we continue to rebuild during the COVID-19 health crisis. Moreover, organizations are asking the governments to take action to improve the inadequacies and inequities of our systems. For this reason, hundreds of organizations endorse the Principles of a Just Recovery. These principles were developed by organizations working together from communities across the country.

The 6 Principles for a Just Recovery are as follows:

- Put people's health and wellbeing first. No exceptions
- Strengthen the social safety net and provide relief directly to people
- Prioritize the needs of workers and communities
- Build resilience to prevent future crises
- Build solidarity and equity across communities, generations, and borders
- Uphold Indigenous Rights and work in partnership with Indigenous peoples

## Delivered Statement in favour of Vancouver City Council Motion: A Call for Race-Based and Socio-Demographic Data in B.C

I spoke on behalf of the Society, in favour of the motion at **Vancouver City Council**. SFSS is to continue supporting Black communities' calls for effective race-based data that centralize Black / Indigenous researchers and communities in order to help inform anti-racist policy-making. The motion passed.



Date completed: June 23, 2020

## Implemented Board Voting Record Listing

I was a strong advocate for transparency and accountability when I ran for office, and one of the first motions I had the privilege to support was the listing of names on the SFSS record of how Board members vote.

Date completed: May, 2020

## Changed SFU Athletics Team Name

I actively [supported](#) the *I Am Not Your Clansmen* campaign, led by Black student athletes and movement organizers, calling for the University to change the SFU Athletics team name from The 'Clan'. Too often, people heard 'Klan', associating our team name to the white terrorist group the Ku Klux Klan. I proposed a motion to the SFSS Board of Directors, which passed unanimously, to endorse the athletes' campaign, as well as support in organizing and amplifying students' calls. I advocated for the name-change directly to Joy Johnson, incoming SFU President, and Chair of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Executive Sub-Committee.

### Outcomes and Results

- SFSS endorsed I Am Not Your Clansmen campaign calling for SFU to drop the Clan Athletics name
- SFU dropped the Clan name, and are now working with athletes to select a new name we can all be proud to represent. The SFSS has been providing guidance to SFU on a smooth and respectful consultation process of FNSA and SOCA. SOCA has noted issues and harm caused by SFU during this process, and we have been supporting SOCA and calling for restorative justice that centres those harmed.

Date [Completed](#): August 2020

## Collaborated with SFU Anti-Racism Working Group

I represented SFSS at a university-wide anti-racism working group that included the SFSS, GSS, SFU Faculty Association (SFUFA), Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group (SFPIRG), and Teaching Support Staff Union (TSSU). We discussed anti-racism initiatives we were working on and strategize how to support one another's efforts.

Fall 2020

## Held a Historic Annual General Meeting: Adopted a New Student Governance Model

### 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 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.

## 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)*

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 #OurDecisionSFU Restorative Justice 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 it's

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BIPOC STATEMENT REGARDING SFU ATHLETICS TEAM  
NAME CHANGE



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 Charters 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

- SFU started providing 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:

- Ongoing

## Provided Anti-Racism Recommendations to SFU Administration

### 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 committed to beginning the collection of race-based data by Fall 2021
- SFU Health and Counselling hired a temporary Black counsellor, and hired an Indigenous Counsellor

- SFSS worked 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.
- The University established a senior administration VP People, Equity, and Sustainability role at SFU, with the input of marginalized community groups

## Mobilized 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

## Created a New Staff Role (Board Organizer)

### 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 completed

## Increased Health and Counselling Resources for Racialized Students

### 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


## Amplified 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 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

## Created an SFSS Podcast (CJSF Radio 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

## Institutionalized Black History Month Within 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 people's labour.

I have been working on developing an Issues Policy titled IP-2: Black History Month, in support of SFSS recognizing BHM in a respectful and empowering manner to Black students. On the recommendation of the BIPOC Committee, the Board created an Issues

Policy on Black History Month. Nafoni and I consulted with SOCA and drafted this policy - co-sponsored by SFSS Black Caucus - that was passed by the Board. The goal is to celebrate Blackness year round, while ensuring that [BHM is celebrated within the SFSS long term](#), and in a way that is respectful and empowering to Black students already celebrating and doing labour.



#### Outcomes

- Passed SFSS Black History Month Issues Policy
- Ensured SFSS is mandated to practically support and amplify Black-led BHM celebrations and empowerment initiatives
- Celebrated Black Women in leadership

Date Completed: February 26, 2021

#### Collaborated 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 SFSS Board consistently emphasized to SFU Administration the need to consult the wider Black community, including the new Caucus.

I played an active role in representing a student perspective, particularly representing the SFSS on the newly formed SFU Black Caucus this year. The Caucus put out an open letter and [statement](#), which recieved 700+ signatures, condemning the racial profiling and violent arrest of a Black SFU alumna that occurred in December 2020. We worked together on providing consultations to the University regarding the VP People, Equity, and Inclusion role that the University is developing after SFSS recommended it.

I am heavily involved in the Caucus' development in terms of governance. I want to formalize an equitable decision-making structure within the Caucus to ensure that students

are not overshadowed by staff and faculty, who hold relative power compared to students within the context of academic institutions.

I am also part of the ongoing conversations with SFU about how to formally embed the Black Caucus into SFU's governance as well.

#### Outcomes

- SFSS collaborated with SFU Black Caucus in steering the direction to push Black empowerment and anti-racism efforts at SFU
- The SFU Black Caucus supported Black students and alumni who faced the brunt of anti-Black racism as we called for transparent and equally-enforced campus safety and security policies
- President Joy Johnson verbally agreed with the Caucus that the policies need to be reviewed
- SFU struck a Community Engagement on Personal Safety Steering Committee, led by Mark Lalonde, Chief Safety Officer for SFU

Timeline: On-going

### **Represented 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.

Completed: Spring Semester

### **Consulted SFU on New 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 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

## Spring 2021

### **Advocated for Consultation of Black and Indigenous Students re: Team Name Selection Consultation**

After supporting the Athletes' successful campaign to pressure SFU to drop the 'Clan' name, I worked closely with incoming VP Equity & Sustainability Marie Haddad to ensure that there is meaningful consultation done between SFU and the marginalized students who put in the bulk of the labour to change the name. Considering that they endured significant harm due to the former team name, the consultation is to make sure that they are comfortable with the new team name.

### **Developed SFSS Issues Policies**

The [Issues Policies](#) systemically solidifies our student union's approach to social justice when it comes to financial, socio-political, and academic advocacy relating to student life and post-secondary education that are important to the SFSS membership. I wrote the policies on Black History Month and Anti-Racism with the support of Black, Indigenous, and Students Of Colour; I helped directly with policies on Living Wage & Union Rights as well as Police and Militarization. I am thankful for the undergrad students who came together to work on these, and I'm happy to have helped coordinate the efforts.

Date [completed](#): April 23, 2021


## Recommended and Consulted on SFU's New VP Equity, People & Inclusion (PEI) Role

The SFSS first presented the SFU VP Equity idea in October 2020, during a BIPOC Committee meeting. The University responded saying they're considering an Associate VP for this. However, we were vocally resisting that, and continued pressuring for a Vice-President role because we believe that having this person report to more people simply creates more institutional barriers to implementing effective change at the University. In a meeting, I expressed concern that SFU top leadership is [overwhelmingly white](#), noting that there is currently no Black or Indigenous senior leadership at SFU ([The 2020 SFU Diversity Meter Report](#)). This means that the University has not, and will not, adequately support Black, Indigenous, and POC if BIPOC leaders are not empowered with governance power and funding to create change in the institution. Later in the year, SFU announced that they will be establishing a *VP People, Equity, and Inclusion* position! However, the University then began taking this initiative led by BIPOC, and excluding us from it's development process. That is when we emphasized the importance of proactively including marginalized students, as the current marginalization at SFU is a direct result of the University excluding BIPOC from the initial creation of policy development and consultation processes.

Thankfully, SFU was receptive to SFSS' request for them to consult the wider community due to our pressure. I mobilized people to come out to the virtual forum, ran a campaign for folks to submit their personal questionnaire responses, and successfully advocated for SFU to consult equity-seeking groups on campus - such as SFU Black Caucus, Graduate Student Society (GSS), First Nations Student Association (FNSA), Students Of Caribbean and African Ancestry (SOCA), Disability and Neurodiversity Alliance (DNA), Women's Centre, Out on Campus (OOC), and the Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group (SFPIRG). Many students echoed similar concerns about exclusion of student empowerment being centred in the role's responsibilities. Ask for updates and keep pressuring for meaningful consultation, more student reps on the hiring committee, and major changes to the candidate profile

The main issue is that we want to ensure that this is a role that encompasses empowering students in its scope of responsibilities and not just be an HR-focused role. Emphasis was placed on lived experience, especially advocating for proactive Black and Indigenous recruitment for the role.

I drafted the SFSS' written submission highlighting our priorities and recommendations for the role. While I coordinated the campaign, I worked with the President and VP University Relations to ensure that student concerns were vocalized unequivocally on this matter during their meetings with the Administrators.



Our efforts proved effective, as SFU changed the job description to reflect marginalized students' feedback! It was a successful, year-long campaign that I am proud of.

## Submitted Recommendations to the BC Police Act Review

I worked with Iulia Zgreabăn, an at-large member of SFSS External Committee, to [submit recommendations](#) to the Legislative Assembly of BC's Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act to consider investing in community-based safety aids to benefit the entire community. In the letter sent this Thursday, April 29th, the Society lists six recommendations aimed at helping ensure that marginalized communities are protected from harm. The document affirms the SFSS's support towards transformative justice, challenging the notion that increasing police presence and practices will increase safety.

The recommendations are as follows:

1. The Province must work with Indigenous peoples in BC to align the Police Act with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
2. Ban all police street checks.
3. Shift resources from policing to community safety and decriminalize social issues.
4. Decriminalization (of sex work, drugs and simple drug possession, public intoxication, poverty, immigration status, and of Indigenous land defense by Indigenous nations asserting Title and Rights on their lands and waters).
5. Moratorium on Police Use of Force and Surveillance Technology.
6. Overhaul of Police Accountability, Oversight and Governance Bodies.

**In addition to the recommendations stated above, the SFSS endorses the demands of the Defund 604 Network with regards to policing.**

Date completed: April 29, 2021

## Created WUSC x SFSS Scholarships for Domestic Students with a Refugee Background and Domestic Black Students

The World University Services Canada SFU (WUSC SFU) is a student-led club that supports refugee youth education through a partnership with WUSC and hopes to increase awareness about forced migration. [We partnered with WUSC](#) to establish two annual scholarships they proposed. The new financial aid program will award one domestic student with a refugee background and one domestic Black student per term with a total of

\$20,000 annually. This is one way to support empowerment policies and initiatives that work towards accessibility to post-secondary education for all students, including marginalized individuals who disproportionately have lower access to education.



Date completed: April 9, 2021

## Supported Indigenous Land Defenders

<https://sfss.ca/sfss-endorses-the-braided-warriors/>

I proposed that SFSS use Society resources to amplify the work of Indigenous youth land defenders against capitalist colonial violence. They have been on the front lines protesting insurers such as AIG Insurance and CHUBB Insurance to stop insuring the Trans Mountain Expansion (TMX) project. The SFSS endorsed and distributed the open letter, written by the Braided Warriors, Black Lives Matter Vancouver, and Defund 604 Network, condemning the VPD and calling for accountability for their racist and violent actions against law-abiding protestors.





Date completed: March 12, 2021

## Established a Black Student Support Centre & Hired a Coordinator

As a systemic support for Black students, I proposed that the SFSS establish a Black Student Support Centre (BSSC). I also drove [the hiring](#) of a BSSC Coordinator to assist in effective support, advocacy and service delivery for the space that has been allocated for the SFSS Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry (SOCA) constituency group in the new Student Union Building. 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



The Board of Directors authorize Osob Mohamed and Balqees Jama, alongside the HR and Personnel Committee, to initiate and complete the process to employ a Black Student Support Center - Coordinator (SOCA's Support Staff), ensuring input and active participation from SOCA and other relevant parties for the creation of a job description and creation of the functions of the centre. It was a smooth and efficient process overall.

#### Outcomes:

- SFSS Board included \$10, 000 for the Black Student Support Centre for the next year's budget planning

- Hiring of BSSC Coordinator is complete
- Office to be set up by incoming SOCA Executive team and membership

## **Advocated for Campus Safety and Minimizing Police Presence**

On March 11, 2021 [SFSS Released a Response to the Release of MacKay Report Summary by SFU.](#)

The MacKay Report was meant to be in response to the violent arrest that took place in SFU Dining Hall on December 11, 2020. The report summary that was released was insufficient with the shocking lack of concrete findings and recommendations of this investigation. The report did not point to which policies the Alumnus violated, and also failed to outline what SFU procedures were/were not followed. Neither witnesses nor the alumnus were interviewed, yet the report makes a claim that the alumnus was aware of a key fact. There was also new information presented regarding the reason.

[We continue](#) (in addition to our previous demands) to call for:

1. A change to SFU policies that disproportionately impact racialized and other marginalized students, and for SFU to do meaningful work to have said policy changes with input led by Black, Indigenous and other equity deserving groups.
2. The release of the full Mackay Report with identifiable information redacted for the full extent of this review process.

SFU Black Caucus also released a statement on March 13, 2021 with similar concerns, rejecting the findings of the report.


### **Outcomes**

- President Joy Johnson verbally agreed with the Caucus that the policies need to be reviewed
- SFU struck a Community Engagement on Personal Safety Steering Committee, led by Mark Lalonde, Chief Safety Officer for SFU

Timeline: ongoing

## **Provided Feedback on the Scarborough National Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion**

I provided input on the draft Scarborough National Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian higher education, in governance, research, teaching & learning, and community engagement. The charter is the result of a series of national forums focused on addressing equity and inclusion in Canadian higher education. This first forum focused on anti-Black racism and Black inclusion and a national committee created a charter of



principles and actions (Scarborough Charter) that institutions can commit to draw on as they address anti-Black racism and Black inclusion. SFU President Joy Johnson has reached out to the BIPOC Committee for feedback on the draft of the Scarborough National Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion: Principles, Actions, and Accountabilities.

## Other Works

### Human Resources and Personnel Committee

In the HRP COM, we did things like create or review job descriptions and job offers. We discussed staff relations, and addressed private matters regarding staff that arose.

### Joined Hiring Committees

I participated in the hiring processes for the following positions:

- SFU Registrar and Executive Director of Student Enrollment
- SFSS Board Organizer
- SFSS Black Student Support Centre Coordinator

### Co-Chaired the Inaugural SFSS Black, Indigenous and People Of Colour (BIPOC) Committee

As co-chair, alongside VP Student Services Matthew Provost, I drove the BIPOC committee's direction and coordination. I did tasks such as collaborating with other student committees and groups, reading statements, and writing reports. I read needed documents, prepared for meetings, prepared agendas and reviewed draft minutes for the committee I chaired, submitted work orders to the Communication or Policy departments. I also played a tactful role in creating a space where committee members could safely discuss sensitive, nuanced, and sometimes triggering matters. These are all important however and crucial to operating effectively.

## Built Solidarity and Coalitions

I built many relationships with students, grassroots community organizers, supportive individuals in the SFU community. These alliances were on behalf of the SFSS, but many have turned into rewarding personal relationships.

### Solidarity & Coalition Building

#### Solidarity

- Contract Workers at SFU
- Braided Warriors
- Research Assistants Unionization
- The Farmers' Protest in India
- SFSS in Solidarity Against anti-Asian Racism
- Solidarity with Black Communities Against Systemic Injustice

#### Coalition Building

- COVID-19 Coalition
- SFU Migrant Students United
  - SFSS, Teaching Support Staff Union (TSSU), Graduate Student Society (GSS), International Student Advocates (ISA)



## Coordinated Teams

While I did have some minimal responsibilities, I played a large role in leading the Board as someone who is unafraid to tackle matters head on. I often helped Board members with spontaneous tasks they were driving when they needed it, and also played a coordination role within the team on advocacy projects. I also helped facilitate consultation with marginalized student groups to ensure they were respectful and safe. Board members would often ask me questions about various matters and I'm always happy to provide context and clarity as we work together towards our goals.



## Recommendations

### **Build interpersonal relationships.**

So much of my achievements this year have been a direct result of being proactive about building relationships. Send that introduction email. Stop to say hello to students on campus, or DM students you see in SFU social media bubbles. Follow and engage community leaders and powerful decision-makers. Proactively starting these connections makes reaching out to people so much more effective.

### **Do not shy away from confrontation.**

I don't mean fight, but rather address conflicts in the moment as soon as they arise. If you have a boundary, communicate it. If you believe someone wronged you, intentionally or not, communicate it to prevent it for the future. Debate in good faith, as we know that we are interested in the same cause of empowering students in every way. Just ensure that you debate with your research done prior. Make space for dialogue by listening to understand, and not only to reply! At Council or Committees, make sure to vote in such a way that is in line with your true assessment of the decision at hand.

### **Live-stream the bi-weekly Council meetings to YouTube.**

Work with staff immediately to sort logistics and live-stream from Zoom to YouTube. This is to be as open and accessible to our undergraduate members as possible, and increase engagement. This is possible with the resources we have been using.

Additionally, in February 2021, the Board [approved \\$24,650.25](#) for the installation of video conferencing equipment into Student Union Building rooms 3331, 2440 and 2420. This is to help ensure transparency and accessibility of meetings even after we resume in-person activities.

### **Accept that criticism comes with the role.**

You should expect to be held accountable, in healthy, democratic ways. Hateful statements, and harassment is never warranted, but you should encourage SFSS members to hold elected representatives accountable. That is part of healthy democracy.





## **Set boundaries for yourself.**

Boundary setting is hard, but vital. An easy thing to do is to close all SFSS tabs on your computer when you're **not** working. It's already hard enough closing the million tabs in your head, as we juggle all the different tasks we have to do. Some matters require you to be on your feet no matter how busy or tired you are, because your inaction would have harmful consequences. During those times, I recommend that you push through, and deliberately budget time for rest and scaling back afterwards when that intense period is over.

## **Positional How-To's**

### **Proactively build interpersonal relations.**


At the start of every year or semester, send hello/introduction emails to everyone you anticipate you will work with during the year. Within your organizing team, schedule check-ins. Not all of them need to focus on work-matters only, as conversations about other life things are bound to happen. Ideally, even if you're not friends, you need to invest time and energy into building connections with your peers. This can look like showing up spontaneously to events, stopping to chat (or message) students you pass by, or vocalizing support and acknowledgements of people's work when you agree.

### **Use all functions of your SFSS Google and Zoom accounts.**

Stay efficient by using the tools that come with the apps you have access to with SFSS accounts. On Google, you could use standard functions like the to-do lists, calendar invites (including viewing other SFSS shared calendars). You can schedule Zoom meetings linked to your Google Calendar as well. Stay organized by Google Drive apps like Docs, Slides, Sheets, Forms, etc.

### **Prepare in advance for meetings.**

Read the documents you'll be discussing before the meeting, and write your key points down. You should be making points in favour or against decisions, and if you need to inquire more, make sure you ask questions during the right time. Come prepared with your arguments, questions, calls to action, and desired timelines. If it is a particularly important discussion, come with a written briefing note to give the person you're meeting with so that they have reference to what you shared. At the end of the meeting, write down action



items based on what you agreed on, and make sure you follow up with updates and action items completion.

### **Plan for some spontaneity.**

As ironic as this subtitle sounds, you must budget intentional free time to avoid overwhelming yourself. With the spontaneous, exciting, and sometimes stressful nature of student societies, new developments or situations always arise. Some of these matters need your immediate response regardless of how time-consuming or energy-consuming they are. It's important to always plan for things to come up.

## **Final Thoughts**

I hope this report, and my reflections within it, serves as a resource for any student organizer. Please reach out to me personally at [balqees\\_jama@sfu.ca](mailto:balqees_jama@sfu.ca) if you ever want to connect or discuss SFU activist history! I will also be available to collaborate or consult as President of SOCA (Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry) for the 2021-22 year, through [sfusoca@gmail.com](mailto:sfusoca@gmail.com).