

2020-2021



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EDUCATION REP'S EXIT REPORT

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Executive Summary

In the 2020/2021 Board term, I focused predominantly on projects that improve the well-being, financial health, and academic experience of SFU undergraduates. My efforts include: Open Educational Resources (OER) campaigns and advocacy, the Psycho-Educational Assessment Pilot Program, and various initiatives within the Faculty of Education that seek to support students during the COVID-19 pandemic, advocate for anti-racism education, promote getting involved in the community, and unite Education students and faculty members.

Even as a returning Board member, this term has been challenging. I chose to pursue initiatives that require time, research, consultation, and collaboration with many groups and individuals. I found it difficult at times to remain motivated and stay focused. That being said, I learned a lot from the process and the people who guided me and supported my goals.

If I were to offer a piece of advice to my predecessor, or any student representative, it would be to establish connections with key community members who can help you achieve your goals. Email people, introduce yourself, organize a meeting, share your ideas — put yourself out there. My favorite part of being the Faculty of Education Representative for the Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) was the relationships I built and the work I was able to accomplish through these relationships.



Overview

The Faculty of Education Representative plays a pivotal role in supporting Education students and enhancing the overall student experience at SFU by liaising with faculty, staff, students, and other decision-makers in the community. The following are groups and individuals that I worked closely with to achieve my goals this term:

- SFSS Accessibility Advisory Committee
- SFSS University and Academic Affairs Committee
- SFSS Events Committee
- SFSS Mandatory Anti-Racism Education working group
- SFU OER working group
- Dean of Education
- Faculty of Education Director of Undergraduate Programs
- Faculty of Education Undergraduate Programs Committee
- Education Student Association (ESA)
- SFSS Campaigns, Research, and Policy Coordinator
- Director of the Centre for Accessible Learning
- Studentcare

Role Breakdown

As the Faculty of Education Representative, I am responsible for liaising with the Faculty — most notably the Dean of Education and Director of Undergraduate Programs — to convey student perspectives on student affairs. I regularly attended Faculty Council meetings, Undergraduate Programs Committee meetings, and semesterly meetings with the Dean, and I reported Faculty news and updates to the Departmental Student Union, ESA, at their bi-weekly meetings. It is also my duty to communicate information about SFSS campaigns and changes to the ESA, facilitate dialogue, and collect feedback.

As a Board Member, I serve all undergraduates, and I center my work and decision-making around their best interests, which requires a lot of student consultation. This term, I liaised with the ESA about student-related issues such as anti-racism education and the Pass/Credit/No Credit Grading Scheme, and Student At-Large members of the Accessibility Committee about Psycho-Educational Assessments. I surveyed students about textbooks to understand how the cost of course materials affects student financial health, and how OER can benefit students.



Challenges

When I worked on the Psycho-Educational Assessments Pilot Project, I spent a year consulting students, particularly those from the SFU Disability and Neurodiversity Alliance (DNA), to perfect the service. I was constantly going back and forth between Studentcare and students, negotiating and renegotiating aspects of the claims process according to students' questions and concerns. Every time I thought we were close to the finish line, someone suggested something new, for example, expanding the benefit to include psychological assessments, which led to more complications and conversations with Studentcare and the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL). I wouldn't say we wasted time pursuing this idea because, from it, we learned that the psychology benefit covers the cost of psychological assessments, but things like this prolonged the process. Student feedback is central to the work we do at the SFSS, but at one point, I realized that I couldn't solve everything or make everyone happy. The Psycho-Educational Assessments Pilot Project is not perfect, but it will evolve and improve over time as students use it. As such, we chose to prioritize launching the program so students *can* use it.

Learning Experiences

Working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled me to cultivate new skills. I learned to use technology to adapt project ideas for the digital space and solve problems in creative ways. For example, the original plan for the OER student campaign video was to film student testimonials and interview OER working group members. However, due to the pandemic, I could not interact with students and colleagues as I would have on campus. Thus, I decided to create a textbook survey to collect student testimonials. In the survey, I asked students if they would agree to film a short clip for the video, but the initial responses were mostly negative, so I removed it from the questionnaire. I switched to plan B to include the student testimonials as text bubbles narrated by Board members to emulate different student voices.

Key Contacts

- Education Student Association (<https://www.facebook.com/SFU.ESA> & <https://www.instagram.com/sfu.esa/>)
- Education Dean (eddean@sfu.ca)
- Director of Undergraduate Programs (margaret_macdonald@sfu.ca)



Projects and Initiatives

Open Educational Resources (OER)


I was the point of contact for all things related to OER this term. The majority of projects in my portfolio pertain to OER. I directed my efforts towards raising awareness for OER, why they are valuable, and where to find them, to urge instructors to adapt and adopt OER for their courses. In summer 2020, I wrote a letter detailing the need for OER and led the OER FARM (Faculty and At-Large Representatives Members) Letter Campaign. In response to the OER letter, the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Environment showed their support by forwarding the letter to instructors. The other faculties did not respond.

In fall 2020, I designed an OER Faculty Survey and helped organize and participated as a speaker at the SFU Open Access Week OER Workshop. The objective of the survey was to encourage instructors to report OER usage so the OER Grants Committee can accurately track OER usage and student savings at SFU. Unfortunately, the survey received only 11 responses, all of which were from instructors in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Many respondents were not using OER or did not know what OER is. The OER workshop was more successful than the survey. The event garnered the interest of 14 instructors who were eager to learn about OER and exchange ideas.

In spring 2021, I started to work on an OER Student Campaign Video. I recruited two knowledgeable members of the OER working group to film themselves talking about OER and how OER benefits students, I contacted the SFU Bookstore Manager for course material expense statistics from 2019 and 2020, and I created a textbook survey to ask students about the cost of their course materials and financial health. I drafted an outline to combine and convey all of this information efficiently. I collaborated with the Communications Coordinator, Sindhu, to format the video with graphics, subtitles, and narration. The purpose of the video is to raise awareness of OER among students, start a conversation, and unite undergraduates to advocate for textbook affordability. With the Social Media Assistant, Julia, we compiled the textbook survey data from 469 responses into a report, which the SFSS can use for future advocacy efforts.

Psycho-Educational Assessments (PEA) Pilot Project

The PEA Pilot Project was the greatest undertaking of my SFSS career. It took a long time to research PEAs, consult with colleagues and student groups and negotiate the claims process with the insurer. After a year of virtual meetings and email correspondences with Studentcare, SFU CAL, the SFSS Accessibility Committee, and SFU DNA, the SFSS



officially launched the service in April 2021, becoming one of the two student societies in Canada currently providing this benefit in conjunction with Studentcare and Pacific Blue Cross (PBC).

When I picked up the PEA Pilot Project from my predecessor, it was known as the Learning Disability Assessment Pilot Project. Sarah, the SFSS Campaigns, Research, and Policy Coordinator, and I worked hard to expand the program to include assessments for learning disabilities, ADHD, and social, emotional, behavioral, and psychological problems. We learned a lot from our conversations with the Director of CAL, who shared valuable insight and advice. As the project progressed, I regularly communicated updates to the Accessibility Committee and received feedback from members of SFU DNA. Studentcare played a significant role in liaising with PBC, incorporating our ideas and feedback, and drafting the claims process. Thanks to the efforts of these individuals, the SFSS can subsidize PEAs for our members and reduce the financial burden of PEAs which generally range from \$2,000-\$3,000, therefore making it more accessible to students. Disabled students with a PEA can request class and exam accommodations from CAL to succeed in their studies and other facets of life.

Faculty of Education

I established good working relationships with the Faculty this term, which led us to collaborate on diverse projects. In May 2020, I worked with Natalia Gajdamaschko, the Associate Dean of Academic and Faculty Development, to conduct a virtual COVID-19 student focus group. The student feedback helped the Faculty understand how COVID-19 affected the student experience and informed their remote practice. In June 2020, I co-wrote a letter with Jasmine Peachey, a teacher candidate in the SFU Professional Development Program (PDP), to advocate for the inclusion of mandatory anti-racism courses in all Faculty of Education undergraduate and graduate programs. In the months following, I continued the conversation with the Dean of Education, Susan O'Neill, and the Director of Undergraduate Programs, Margaret MacDonald. Despite our efforts, the Faculty will not be mandating students to take an anti-racism course. However, we did prompt the Faculty to re-evaluate education courses using ecological EDI (equity, diversity, inclusion) and anti-racist and anti-oppressive lenses. In December 2020, I collaborated with the Dean, the ESA, and the Faculty of Education Council Representative, Adrienne Blas, to send a heartfelt thank you to the Faculty for their tireless hard work. Adrienne and I set up a Padlet for students to write anonymous appreciation messages. The Faculty loved it; it was a huge success.

As the Faculty of Education Representative, I enjoy promoting SFU resources and services that emphasize student engagement, impart valuable life skills, and direct students



to volunteer and work opportunities within the community. However, I have encountered difficulty interacting with students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, in fall 2020, I designed a Faculty of Education resource package to equip Education students and prospective teachers with the information they need to start working with children and youth. I researched popular SFU volunteer programs and employment opportunities and used my connections to obtain testimonials from undergraduates and alumnus to attest to the benefit of getting involved. I collaborated with the ESA and the Faculty of Education Peer Mentorship Program (PMP) to help promote the digital guidebook. The resource package makes information more accessible and has since amassed 150 views and glowing reviews from students. The Academic Advisors and PMP organizers have agreed to share it with future students to ensure that they can take advantage of the resource.



Recommendations

Every project you pursue will inevitably lead you to work with Board members, SFSS staff, students, or other community members, or a combination of all these people. Collaboration is the key to managing a project from start to finish. Familiarize yourself with the roles that different SFSS Coordinators play, and do not hesitate to ask questions if you are unsure about SFSS policies and procedures. Maintaining consistent communication with your colleagues and partners is imperative to establishing good working relationships, streamlining tasks, and accomplishing your goals efficiently.

Positional How-Tos

To add to my last point, among the people you establish good working relationships with, the Dean and Departmental Student Union (DSU) should be at the top of your list. The Dean will be your main point of contact in the Faculty, and they are the person you must go through to distribute information using the Faculty email list, such as advocacy letters or surveys. You can increase your connections in the Faculty by expressing interest to the Dean about joining committees and working groups to offer a student's perspective in Faculty affairs. This way, you can stay informed about happenings in the Faculty and communicate important news and updates to students. As a student representative, liaising with students in your DSU or FSU is part of the job description, but aligning with students will be necessary if any of your goals intend to improve the student experience, which they should.

Final Thoughts

It has been an honor to serve as the Faculty of Education Representative for the last two years and a pleasure to be a part of the SFSS. I feel gratification knowing that I fulfilled my campaign goals this term and was able to make a positive impact in the SFU community. I hope future Councillors will continue the work I have started.