

2020-2021



simon fraser
student society

PRESIDENT'S EXIT REPORT

Osob Mohamed

Simon Fraser Student Society




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 the 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 Operations Organizer to address labour items within our growing staff team. I ran on a platform of building student power, and student society reform from the inside out. The previous year set some good precedents in terms of bringing the SFSS back to its roots of student activism and advocacy, and with a Board of progressive and equity-focus students, I am confident that this will continue to be a successful year, and one that will help set the building blocks for future Boards to follow.


COVID-19 has shaped our term from the very beginning, having to shift from our regular, in-person services and programming to going almost entirely online. It has been a major transition, but our Board of Directors, staff and volunteers have all been working diligently to make it work, and to provide students with the quality



of support they deserve. Having to do pretty much everything virtually has been a challenge in and of itself, but I really valued the times I was able to come into the office and see some of the other Board members (socially distanced and masked, of course).

As a returning Board member, I can say that this year has been 100% different from my previous experience. Most notably, my responsibilities as a faculty representative are completely different from what is expected of the President, and while some of the portfolio pieces such as chairing the Board, meeting with and pushing for student rights at the University and government levels, and acting as the spokesperson for the organization are right up my alley, there is so much going on in the background, such as staff relations and ensuring the renewal and upholding of different agreements with stakeholders is a huge shift from what I've had to do in the past. It's been a huge learning curve for me, but I am grateful to have had the support of a hard-working, dedicated Board the entire way through. 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!](#)

While I will delve deeper into the specifics of the projects I worked on, some of the major changes and projects that took place over the year including Administrative and Governance restructuring, COVID-19 related advocacy and the SFSS COVID-19 survey, working with the SFU COVID-19 Coalition, advocating for



Black students and the BLM movement, pushing the University to cut ties with the RCMP and reduce police presence on campus, supporting the Bylaw review project, various hiring committees and job description development, planning and coordinating Board development sessions, the BC Budget consultations, the Burnaby Mountain Gondola Project, the Annual General Meeting and more.

This marks the end of my second year with the SFSS, and I am incredibly honoured to have been entrusted by students with this responsibility. I hope that the SFSS will continue to grow into an organization that serves as an advocacy, service provision and engagement hub where we continue to build power and see better outcomes for the students to come for the future.




Overview

Role Breakdown

The role of the President includes being the Chairperson of the Board of Directors, or in the upcoming year, Council. Currently, the President has the power to convene meetings of the Board and Council, and to speak on behalf of the Society at the direction of the Board. I have also had the opportunity to serve as one of our Staff Liaison Officers, to liaise between our staff union CUPE 3338 and the Board, directly supervising all union-excluded staff, and act as one of the Society's signing officers.

On a day-to-day basis, I support other executives in their portfolios, and faculty and at-large representatives with different projects that they're working on. This has included setting up regular meetings with other Board members, to discuss project implementation are areas of support. In addition to this, I take media requests on behalf of the Society, and this has included talking about the Burnaby Mountain Gondola project, the tuition condemnation vote, and sharing some of the issues students have been facing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I also sit on all Board committees and a number of internal committees, including the Joint Health and Safety Group which looks at occupational safety matters, and the Working Conditions Committee, which looks at staffing matters in collaboration with CUPE.



The Presidential role comprises a number of different responsibilities, which may change depending on the different projects the Society is working on. Overall, the role is meant to be a support and de-facto leader of the Board of Directors, and support development, teamwork and accountability of the Board.

Challenges

Some of the challenges of this role include learning quite a bit about staff relations, and dealing with some of the administrative aspects of managing the society. This includes dealing with grievances and other issues, thinking and handling health and safety issues, and ensuring the proper transition of documents into our shared servers.

Learning Experiences

Compared to my role last year as the faculty representative for Health Sciences, this role has had a much different focus. A lot of my learning experiences have included University-level advocacy, including on the Joint Operations Group, Student Affordability Working Group, and regular meetings with the SFU President.

I have also had the opportunity to learn more about lobbying at provincial and federal levels of government, on issues like student finances, anti-racism initiatives and more. The learning is certainly a year-long process, as you deal with different issues that may come up with students, groups and community members. In the end, a major thing to know is that nobody expects you to know everything- and this is why you have knowledgeable team members and staff to help out with these initiatives.



Key Contacts


Key Contacts may change from year to year, but making good use of the media list held by our Communications office is crucial to ensure the outreach during campaigns is effective.

Externally, keeping in contact with other student societies, like the UVSS, UBC AMS, and Capilano Student Union is great, and can be a source of advice and support on campaigns and other initiatives. We also connect with local MPs, MLAs and Burnaby city councillors on different issues that we want to see change or movement on. Within the University, a main contact is the Senior Director in the VP Students and International office Erin, who has been helpful in directing us to different departments within the University.

Projects and Initiatives

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.

The Operations Organizer has been hired as of Spring 2021.




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 finalized the hire, who will be joining us in the upcoming Summer semester.



Black Student Support Centre Coordinator

The development of a Black Student Support Centre has been in the works this year, and the hire will be complete at the end of the Spring term. In order to support our Black, Caribbean, and Afro-Descent students, we are hiring our inaugural BSSC– Coordinator. This position will uniquely be expected to collaboratively work with the SOCA Executives to execute on the mandate of services, events, and advocacy through the Black Student Support Centre.

The BSSC– Coordinator oversees, coordinates and assists in the delivery of programs and services in the SOCA space. The Black Student Support Centre will be housed in one of the offices in the SOCA organizational suite in the Student Union Building, as per the SFSS-SOCA Memorandum of Understanding as outlined in the institutional relationship Letter of Agreement, unless SFSS provides a separate space for the BSSC operations.

The SFSS has a commitment to support marginalized students on campus, and I hope to see this position and new development within the SFSS be a source of support and joy for Black students at SFU, and to provide organizational support to SOCA in a way that is sustainable and long-term.




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

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- 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.


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



Recommendations

One of my biggest recommendations to the future President is please, try to limit your responsibilities outside of the SFSS for the duration of your term. It is very difficult to predict how much time you'll be spending on SFSS related tasks. While it is expected of executives to put in approximately 60 hours bi-weekly, some weeks you will greatly exceed that number and some weeks you'll find yourself with much more free time than you expected. If you are to mix this with a heavy course load, or other major commitments, it will be a struggle to get it all done. As the spokesperson for the Society, you often have to be ready to make statements, or coordinate a board decision on a topic with a very short amount of time. I would recommend making yourself available during working hours 9-5PM as much as you can, and even try to take the Summer semester off school work to situate yourself better at the beginning of the term.

Additionally, I'd recommend finding an organizational system that works well for you. I've been using Notion, which has really helped me to keep track of the tasks I need to start, which ones I need to complete or follow up on, and the ones I've completed. It is really easy to fall behind in emails and other work, so try to stay on top of it as much as possible! Also, try to fill out your reports well ahead of time- it can be a hassle but is necessary to effectively communicate your work with the membership.



Ask for help when you need it! I am so grateful to be on a board with so many compassionate, hardworking people who are great at what they do. Learning to delegate tasks is awkward, but necessary. As the President, your portfolio includes a little bit of everyone else's, but oftentimes there is someone who you can communicate with to get something done, and it will be your job to support them to do it. In the end, as long as there is good dialogue between you and your board members (particularly with Execs regarding some of the more day-to-day operational items) and understanding of what is expected from whom, you're in good shape.



Final Thoughts

As I ran my campaign for President in early 2020, I certainly did not expect this Board term to end this way. Having to move to a fully online service delivery model, all virtual events and campaigns and advocacy having no in-person component was unexpected and difficult. Despite this, I hope that some of these projects and initiatives we have taken on have made a tangible impact on students' lives, or at least begun to lead the SFSS down the path of building a stronger student coalition based on equity and justice.

As with all elected roles, there is a responsibility to the membership that voted you in to make decisions that you believe to be in their best interest, and to follow the mandate that got you voted in the first place. Looking back at the year, I truly hope that the SFSS Board was able to do this- through pushing for students' right to space, an accessible and affordable education, and to attend a school at which they are safe, supported and listened to. I look forward to looking at how the SFSS has evolved in upcoming years, and I hope that the structural changes we put in place to bring student voices and power back to the Society were successful.

As I sign off from 2 exciting, scary, joyful and difficult years with the SFSS, I leave the following message for SFSS Presidents to come: good luck! I really hope that you'll be able to be back on campus for your term, and re-integrate into campus life. It's an incredible opportunity to serve as the President of the Society, but also a huge responsibility. Students have entrusted you to act on their behalf and to



fight for them, and to build student power so that we can attend a University that is safe, affordable, and where students' voices are heard and listened to. Take it seriously, and make sure you're looking out for the students whose voices need to be bolstered the most. We have a responsibility to protect marginalized students, and to ensure they are heard and listened to.