

2020-2021



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**student society**

# VP EXTERNAL RELATIONS' EXIT REPORT

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## Executive Summary

This report is meant to provide the reader with the overview of my work at SFSS as the VP External Relations 2020-2021. I hope that this report acts as a resource to the incoming VP External Relations and provides student membership with the information they need regarding the SFSS external advocacy. At any point, membership wishes to acquire more information, please feel free to contact SFSS office or VP External Relations directly. This report is the compilation of all the previous semester reports and also includes Spring 2021 projects and all the projects that I have worked on in my term and recommendations for a new VP.

Working at SFSS as the Board of Director and VP can be very challenging and overwhelming at times, but you will find it rewarding as well. Due to pandemic, the transition was quite a challenge and there was a sense of urgency for advocacy at all times. Times were difficult, but we tried our best to make a difference. I spent most of my term working on issues related to pandemic and advocated for issues that students are facing. Through our strong advocacy, we were able to provide support that students need and help our community.

I hope this report helps guide new boards and help membership voice their concerns.



## Overview

Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) is a student led not for profit organization at Simon Fraser University representing over 25,000 undergraduate students. The main purpose of SFSS is to advocate and represent SFU undergraduate students and improve their experience.

The SFSS functions under student-elected leadership, every spring student membership vote Board of Director to represent their interest and advocate on their behalf.

Apart from advocating for SFU students, SFSS also provides SFU students with many other services, activities and benefits. Some important services are extended health benefits, UPass program, free legal clinic.

## Role Breakdown

The VP External Relations primarily as the Board member to SFSS and making decisions that will benefit SFU undergraduate students. The duties of VP External Relations are very extensive , but a role and duties of a board member are even more important at organization. The board of directors are responsible for preparing strategic goals, budget and monitoring organizational performance. Directors are responsible for voicing student concern and advocating for their interest on all levels including, but not limited to internal, provincial and federal.

The VP External Relations is responsible for representing students' concerns on federal and provincial level. The following list of duties will help understand the role better.

### Government Relations:

This is one the most important duties of VP External Relation. Most advocacy on government level is done through VP External Relations. It is important to maintain a healthy relationship with officials and connect with them on a regular basis.

### Media relations:

President is usually the face of the organization and represents the organization on many official occasions. But, when instructed VP External relations represent organization. On mostly all the external events VP External Relations is responsible for acting as board spokesperson.



### Student Advocacy:

VP External Relations role exists to advocate on student behalf and it is important to regularly connect with student membership and know their concerns. You can connect student's through holding office hours, conducting surveys and holding student town hall meetings.

### Challenges

I started my term in the middle of a pandemic, so the biggest challenge was keeping up with all the urgent matters and learning everything quickly, and getting used to working online. I would recommend new VP External Relations to get themselves familiar with all the current advocacy work done through ECAC and have an introductory meeting with few government officials.

### Learning Experiences

This role has a lot to offer and many learning opportunities. You will get a chance to represent over 25,000 students at many important events and advocate on several important issues.

### Key Contacts

- All the important contact information of government officials can be found in the VP External Relations Google Drive.



## Projects Highlight:

### BC Budget Consultation:

In June 2020 I was allowed to present a budget recommendation at the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services on behalf of the Simon Fraser Student Society. The budget consultation document was prepared by Sarah Edmunds who holds the staff position as Research and Policy Coordinator at SFSS. At the standing committee, I was given five minutes to speak and present our recommendation for the BC budget. SFSS presented three recommendations, which are stated below. To read the BC budget consultation document and full report, please visit the appendices at the end of this document.

### BC Budget Recommendation:

#### Recommendation 1

Evaluate and revise the operational funding model for post-secondary institutions and increase post-secondary operating grants.


Over the years the operational funding provided to universities from the government has drastically decreased, which made universities rely on student tuition fees. The increase in university tuition fees has put many students under death and greater financial pressure. We recommended the government increase the funding so that universities do not heavily rely on student tuition, and students can be relieved of the financial burden.

#### Recommendation 2

Reduce or eliminate MSP premiums for international post-secondary students

In January 2020 BC eliminated MSP, but at the same time, it increased the Medical fees on internationals from \$37.50 to \$75. Even though the increased amount might not seem much. It still puts international students under more financial burden, as they are already paying higher tuition fees. SFSS recommended the standing committee to reduce or eliminate medical fees on international students.

#### Recommendation 3



Revise the Tuition Limit Policy to limit international student tuition increases to 2% annually, bringing it in line with domestic student tuition

There is a 2% cap on local student tuition fees that prevent universities from exponentially increasing tuition fees. But, there is no cap on international tuition fees on international students. Last year alone SFU increased international tuition fees up to 20%. This puts international students in greater financial pressure. SFSS recommended a standing committee to consider putting a 2% cap on international tuition fees so that students can budget their degree better and be able to complete their education.

### Just Recovery:


In June 2020, SFSS submitted the brief on Canada's COVID-19 Response to the federal government, urging them to take steps to ensure long-term recovery from COVID-19. This project was led by At-Large rep Balqees Jama and Science rep WeiChun Kua. They did an extremely good job in putting all the research together and preparing the brief, which was also featured on the government website. The brief overview can be found below, to read the detailed report please check the appendices at the end of this document.

SFSS asked the federal government to provide all students including international students with adequate financial support. SFSS also urged the federal government to commit to the Just Recovery principle.

- 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.

### Letter against TMX pipeline:

The Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion (TMX) is a great burden on the Canadian economy, our environment and our community. The pipeline expansion puts our students and their health in danger, as it is located down the SFU Burnaby campus, and the exit from the campus runs past the tank farm. This escapes impossible in case of an emergency caused by the tank farm.



We must urge the government to stop TMX immediately. The letter against Trans Mountain Pipeline was led by Science Rep Weichun Kua, Environment Rep Anuki Karunajeewa, SFU Dogwood, and Justice No Pipeline. The letter can be found attached in the appendices.

### The letter included following call to action:

#### 1. Immediately cease TMX and commit to honouring Indigenous sovereignty


- We call for the immediate ratification and legislation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in present-day Canada. This is essential to a Just Recovery. The Senate's failure to pass Bill C-262 was deeply frustrating, and if the Liberal Party is committed to “implement[ing] the Declaration as government legislation by the end of 2020”, then it must recognize that the approval and construction of TMX violate the Declaration.
- We call for the implementation of the calls to action in Volumes 1a and 1b the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

#### 2. Invest in Indigenous-led green infrastructure and green job-retaining initiatives

- We call for the reallocation of funds directed to TMX into current and future Indigenous-led green infrastructure, rather than merely investing the disputed projected revenue into future clean energy projects. This will accelerate the transition to a clean economy, and allow us to ensure that the Liberal Party’s commitment to “all Indigenous communities [being] powered by clean, renewable, and reliable sources of energy” is realized before 2030.
- We call on the federal government to direct funds towards green job-retraining initiatives, such as those proposed by Iron and Earth. It is not only workers who are directly involved in the fossil fuel industry who struggle in the wake of the downturn in oil markets, but those who are involved indirectly, many of whom belong to marginalized groups. All Canadians, including marginalized workers in the fossil fuel industry, deserve a just transition to a low-carbon economy, and an energy transition task force - such as the Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power

Workers and Communities - should also be organized for Canadian fossil fuel workers and their communities. The federal government's insistence on expanding fossil fuel production undermines transnational efforts to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5°C or 2°C. Therefore, it is also time to end subsidies to the failing fossil fuel industry.

The letter was endorsed and signed by many student organizations across BC and was sent to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.



The leading member worked on this project with such great passion and they are still pushing it on both social media and through active protest. I feel proud of them.

## Fall UPass:

Due to COVID-19 and class being moved online in summer 2020, SFSS including other participating institutions suspended the UPass program. The suspension was only for the summer term. As I started my term one of the biggest projects was to negotiate UPass for the fall term on behalf of SFSS at the UPass Advisory Committee (UAC). Later at the UAC, I was also elected as the UAC co-chair to lead the negotiations with Translink and Province on behalf of all participating Student Unions.

Throughout the summer semester, I had several meetings with Province, Translink and UAC to discuss UPass issues and how we can accommodate our students during the fall term. We explored many avenues to make sure we get the best possible deal for our membership. SFSS also conducted a survey to consult with its membership to know if students want UPass back for fall or would they like to keep it suspended. Through the survey, we found 51.5% of students voted in favour of UPass reinstatement and 48.5 voted against the UPass. Also, 12% of the students were not planning to reside in Metro Vancouver for the fall term. After several weeks of negotiations and efforts of SFSS, Translink and other participating institutions we were able to get an exemption for all the students who are not residing in Metro Vancouver. Also, without UPass a student might end up paying anywhere from \$100 to \$177 per month depending on the travel needs. But, UPass brings that cost down to just \$42.50 per month. Board considered all the aspects both accessible and financial before voting on UPass reinstatement. The Motion passed and UPass was brought back for Fall term.

Even though we were able to negotiate a few exemption categories. We were still faced with quite a few unhappy students and received quite a few emails from students who were not happy about UPass being back, many of them showed concern that they have their transportation and should not be forced to pay for UPass service, and some showed concern over classes being online so they have no need of UPass. Even though Classes are online thousands of students depend

UPass service for grocery shopping, transit to work and other essential travel, and not having UPass were putting them under higher financial pressure in this pandemic. I have requested a meeting with UAC to discuss the possibility of getting more exemption limits for the spring semester and see if we can accommodate the needs of our students even



better. SFSS did their best to accommodate everyone, consulted the membership and gave them the right to vote on UPass. Please see the appendices for the detailed brief on UPass.

## Food Hub:

The ERSE working group that operates under the UAA committee ran the Food Hub pilot program in collaboration with SFU, Greater Vancouver Food Hub and Burnaby Neighborhood house from July 2020 to October 2020. The overall program was very well received by students and we received support from students for making it a permanent program.

In summer 2020, SFSS board passed a five thousand dollars budget for the pilot food hub program and we ERSE only used \$1920 from that budget. Most of the cost was from renting tables for the weekly food hub. You can find the breakdown of the budget below.  
Total Costs for SFSS event: \$1920

Table, rolling board, easel or whiteboard (1-5 items) = \$30/each

Table, rolling board, easel or whiteboard (more than 5 items): =  
\$15/each

Aug 5, 12, & 19 = 4 tables at \$30/each x 3 days = \$360

Aug 26, Sept 2, 9, 16, 23, & 30 = 5 tables @ \$30/each x 6 days =  
\$900


Oct 7, 14, 21, 28 = (5 tables at \$30/each + 1 table at \$15/each) x 4  
days = \$660

Total for all events = \$360 + \$900 + \$660 = \$1920

We ran the program for thirteen weeks, and on average we had 55.2 applicants every week and 35.2 actual pickups, and on average each applicant was supporting 2.2 household members.

Even though the actual pickup number is not as high as we expected. But, as we can see each person was supporting on average two people, which shows the impact food hubs created in our community. We are extremely happy to see that we were able to make a change and help our community in a time of need. We are actively working on the possibility of starting a similar program to help students fight food insecurity.

## Post Graduate Work Permit:



In October 2020, I was approached by GSS Director of Academics, Rahil Adli to discuss possible collaboration between SFSS and GSS on the Post Graduate Work Permit (PGWP) extension campaign. The postgraduate work permit is given to international students upon completion of their program. This permit allows them to stay and work in Canada for a certain time and make them eligible to apply for Permanent Residency in Canada. But this permit is only issued once in their whole lifetime as an international student and this permit is also non-renewable. So, when unemployment took its height peak, many former international students also lost their jobs and were left with expiring permits. This soon approaching expiry of permit and losing jobs made it difficult for them to complete the requirement for Canadian PR and put their future in Canada at risk. So, it was a matter of urgency and high importance to state this situation and help thousands for a former international student from deportation.


Throughout the Fall 2020 semester SFSS Science Rep WeiChun and I worked very closely with Directors of GSS and Migrant Student Union to develop a campaign to get PGWP extended. We started developing a letter stating to all the MP's in British Columbia and started to reach out to other student unions to gather support for our letter. I also met with MLA Katrina Chen and discussed this issue, to which Katrina Chen showed her support and offered to schedule meeting MP Terry Beech to discuss possible ways to support students. Later Rahil, Mona and I met with Terry Beech and Katrina Chen and shared our concern. Terry Beech decided to support and write a letter of his own to the Minister of Immigration supporting the extension of PGWP. Around mid-December, we finally finished the letter with the signatures of many other student unions and sent it off to all the MP's in BC. You can read the letter [here](#).

In early January we received a piece of very happy and exciting news from the Minister of Immigration that they have decided to extend PGWP for all the holders for the next 18 months. This was a huge win for us and made us extremely happy, we were able to successfully advocate for the benefits of our former international students and secure their future.

### UPass Spring 2021:

In the Fall 2020 semester, SFSS received many emails from students expressing their discontent regarding the reinstatement of UPass. For that reason, we decided to bring the matters to the UPass Advisory Committee and figure out the best way to satisfy student needs.

At the External and Community Affairs Committee (ECAC), we discussed the possibilities of changing UPass status for the spring semester. Also, I met with Lori MacDonald who



represents Emily Carr Student Union at UAC table and we discussed possibilities of renegotiating UPass for Spring Semester. We brought up many suggestions at the UAC table, such as increasing the exemption limit, introducing new exemption categories, and even asking the Ministry of Transportation to help to subsidise the cost for the Spring semester. But unfortunately, we could not get the exemption limit increased without harming the integrity of the UPass contract with TransLink. However, GSS and SFSS were given to either suspend UPass completely for Spring 2021 or make it in-person only. Which means students who are taking any class that require students to come on campus for their coursework will get UPass and all the other students will not receive UPass. Since SFSSS serves over 25,000 students and most of the students are taking online classes, we decided that it is not in students' favour to take away UPass completely and disregard their votes to bring back UPass. So, board members respected student votes and kept UPass as it is. Lori Macdonald and I are still trying our best to work with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and developing more support for students having challenges with UPass.


### Tuition Fees and Operating grant Letter:

The SFU decided to increase tuition fees by 2% for domestic students and 4% for international students amid pandemics. This decision was not taken very well by students and this put them under more financial pressure. SFSS decided to put a motion forward in the Annual General Meeting to condemn SFU for this decision. The motion passed with overwhelming support.

Over the decade the government operating grant for the post-secondary institution has slowly decreased, while tuition fees kept on increasing. The government provided a cap on domestic tuition that prevented the institution from increasing fees of more than 2% each year. Meanwhile, there is no such cap on international tuition fees to safeguard them and that's why every year institution increase up to 20% on international students fees to states all these matters, I decided to write a letter to BC Primer John Horgan and Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training Melanie Mark to discuss the possibility of putting the cap on international tuition fees and increasing operating grants for post-secondary institutions. You can read the letter here. I also received a reply from the Executive Director of the Post-Secondary System Policy and Liaison Branch, Dean Goodman.

I also met with MLA Katrina Chen to discuss this matter and tried to get her support. Katrina Chen was very supportive, and she helped set up a meeting with the new Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training, Anne Kang.

### International Student Advocacy Office:



International students faced several challenges while pursuing their education in Canada. Some of the challenges include 3-4 times higher tuition, higher international medical fees, immigration issues, and overall lack of support both from government and educational institutions. Due to the lack of constant international student advocacy ECAC proposes to support the establishment of an international student advocacy office. The office will work in collaboration with Migrant Student Worker and several other student organizations in BC. The office will be responsible for providing collective advocacy on behalf of international students in BC at the federal, provincial and municipal level. The office will also provide students with individual immigration support. The International Student Advocacy Office would:

- Operate a hotline for students, and would provide direct support, legal information and one-on-one advocacy to International Students in the Greater Vancouver Area;
- Deliver presentations and information to societies and International Students on campuses when requested or required;
- Support the formation of chapters and committees on campuses to identify ISAO advocacy priorities, and create spaces for mutual support for International Students;
- Carry out advocacy campaigns at institutions and with federal, provincial and municipal governments as identified by chapters and committees. Please visit the following link for a detailed proposal:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QJnvLiBn4KOqZzOSU6Y5CBiiW8vQqOJfMkCtBORY27c/edit?usp=sharing>


In Spring 2021, the Board of Directors officially passed the motion to endorse the International Advocacy office and act as founding members.

### Lobby Days:

In Spring 2021, ECAC led SFSS lobby days and presented several student concerns to government officials on both provincial and federal level. The lobby topics can be found below. The detailed report can be found in VP External Relations Google drive and membership can request the report directly from the external relations office.

### Federal Topics:

- Eliminate interest on the federal portion of Canada Student Loans indefinitely
- Provide \$375 million in permanent funds for a Transit Congestion Relief Fund for Metro Vancouver


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  - Build back a better Canada post-pandemic by integrating the Six Principles of a Just Recovery
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  - Suspend the Trans Mountain Expansion Project and ensure the safety of the surrounding community
  - Increase federal support for GAR program refugees' access to Canadian postsecondary education
  - Allocate a portion of the \$55+ billion available through the National Housing Strategy towards building affordable student rental housing units
  - To modify the National Food Policy to include the subsidization of healthy foods for youth, as proposed by Food Secure Canada.

### Provincial Topics:

- Operating Grants and Operating Funding Model for Post-Secondary Institutions
- International Post-Secondary Student MSP
- International Student Tuition Cap
- Funding for Post-Secondary Sexual Violence Prevention and Support
- Race-Based Data Collection
- Abolishment of provincial police forces and redirection of funds
- Introduce universal accessibility legislation that applies to public institutions and businesses in BC

### Recommendations

- Connect with student organizations in BC, such as UBC AMS, UVIC Student Society. Also, it is important to connect with Alliance of British Columbia Students, it will provide several collaboration opportunities.

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- Connect with student membership and develop surveys to stay updated on student concern.
  - Develop strategic advocacy plans, plan out priorities inline with organization values.
  - Manage your workload and schedule properly with taking your academics in mind.
  - Work can get overwhelming sometimes, it is important that you take proper breaks.

## Final Thoughts

Serving on the SFSS board has been most rewarding and I am proud that I had a chance to advocate on behalf of 25,000 SFU students. It helped me develop myself both professionally and personally. I am happy that I was able to work on several bring campaigns and win, such as Post graduate Work Permit Extension. Sometimes it did get overwhelming and challenging. But, the motivation to serve our students really helped me to keep doing my work.

I will always be proud of all the work that I have done at SFSS and I will always be grateful for all the support I have received from the team. This role has taught me so much and has helped me become a great leader.

I will always be grateful for everything SFSS has helped me achieve.