

simon fraser
student society

**EXECUTIVE
OFFICER'S
SEMESTER
REPORT**



Almas Phangura
VP Finance & Services
Sep 2021 - Dec 2021



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Hello everyone,

My name is Almas Phangura (she/her) and I am the Vice President Finance and Services of the Simon Fraser Student Society for the year 2021-2022. My goal for this year was to work on providing equitable services to help increase opportunities for marginalized groups on campus, improve health and dental plans and fight for affordable education for all.

Summer: I am happy to report that I have had the chance to work on the health and dental plan over summer. I have met with StudentCare multiple times to discuss our insurance plans and how to make them better. We switched from retention accounting to fully insured insurance plan. This has been a major step to avoid deficits to the society given the increase in number of claims projected for Fall as students went back to school. Keeping in mind the results of a previous survey, students would like to see an increased vision coverage. During my meetings for fall with StudentCare, this was a priority for me while negotiating for plans for 2022-2023. I am looking forward to the addition of all these expanded services once the referendum question is approved (hopefully!)

In addition to my duties and responsibilities listed in the policies, I was a part of the following committees in Fall, 2021:

- Financial and Administrative Services Committee (Chair)
- Space Oversight Committee
- Executive Committee

Fall: The fall semester was heavily based on continuing the projects started in the Summer semester. I have been able to work on a variety of projects that are listed in detail below. I was able to create easy to understand visuals of all the key finances of the society in an effort to make finances more transparent to the student body. I am looking forward to liaising on budget planning with FASC members in the coming semester, the framework of which has been laid. I have also been involved in consultations with VanCity about their suggestions on the investments we have previously made and any changes going forward. This semester I have been

researching about bringing up a new scholarship/ funding grant for International students which I am hoping to bring to Council in Spring 2022.

Please see my work reports to read more about the work done previously and also in the coming months. I have also been active as a Student Senator this year to advance my efforts in advocating for students. If you have any questions or suggestions, please feel free to reach me at vpfinance@sfss.ca

An observation and recommendation: This role has been held mostly by undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business but it is important to note that the VP Finance's work is not heavily based on their knowledge about finance as we have two qualified Financial Coordinators to help out with that, but rather in understanding the structure and the processes of financial procedures, and being able to communicate that with staff, students, and councillors. A student from any background can perform well in the role given their passion for it.

Sincerely,
Almas Phangura

COMPLETED PROJECTS



Digital Media Assistant Hiring Committee

The goal of the Digital Media Assistant Hiring Committee was to hire one Assistant for the Communications Department to ensure the smooth operations of the digital platforms like social media accounts, SFSS Website and help Ilham-Communications Coordinator in any tasks. The candidate was expected to have some background in digital media and marketing along with working knowledge of photoshop, UX/UI and Canva. The committee was composed of two employer representatives, myself and Jess Dela Cruz and two SFSS Staff Members Beaty Omboga and Ilham Banttahar.

The posting was open for about 2 weeks. Around 23 applications were received, of which 16 applicants qualified for the role. 5 applicants who passed the pre-screening stage were invited for interviews. I was accountable for checking their references and holding the interviews along with other members (round-table interviews held).

Annual General Meeting Presentation and Report

My portfolio is tasked with a very important role at the Annual General Meeting as the Vice President Finance gives an Annual Financial report of the previous fiscal year. This includes the overview of all the revenue streams, the revenue collected from these streams, the summary of expenditure and breakdown of how various funds were spent in different line items.

To make the finances easier to understand and keep my campaign promise of a more accessible and transparent financial system, I wanted to present all the figures in a visual fashion. I took the assistance of the Vice President Internal and Organisational Development to make detailed spreadsheets of the revenues and expenditures of different departments and constituency group funds. These were compared with the figures from the last 5 fiscal years to show any trends or how the society's use of funds have changed over the years.

ON-GOING PROJECTS

Afghan Scholars' Funding Working Group

Some updates on the Project: The council had approved \$2000 for helping new Afghan scholars settle in Canada through a motion brought forward by Prof. McAllister and Ashran Bharosa. SFU has admitted around 8 students so far. It is the people in Afghanistan who are at high risk at this current moment and the working group wants to be cognizant of it. It has come to our attention that a group of scholars in Australia help people flee the dangerous areas. Nina B has been contacting SFU and pushing them to take action. She is doing fund-raising and supports them.

The scholar we have been in touch with so far has been very modest but they had to change their accommodations once, and he doesn't want to ask much of them .

They are waiting for the Canadian government to grant them a visa. They also dealt with other issues as their wife's medical documentation was lost.

Once their visa is approved, we shall need to find out if SFU has set up a quarantine or an Airbnb for their arrival (based on the PHO orders). On the logistics side of things, the graduate coordinator must enroll the scholar within SFU to access funding.

Next steps: Reach out to Laya, Erin, and Gretchen to see the support that is being provided for the Undergraduate and Graduate students who are here or are arriving. Marie has been tasked to get the meeting with SFU set-up and provide the updates.

- Get them the GSS membership forms -> Corbett will do this
- See where we can fill in the gaps in accordance with SFU.
- Create a day to day plan, 3-5 years support plan, and possible motions that need to go forward to Council/Executive if needed.
- Create a plan for the future executives to take on once Marie, Corbett, Almas and Ashran are out of office (April 2022).

Making the SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) Sheet

Background and previous updates: The portfolio of VP Finance and Services has various responsibilities that can be turned into SOPs for incoming members and staff to assist them and act as a guide sheet for the different procedures. Corbett Gildersleeve (VP Internal and Developmental Organization) started the project to make SOPs.

I made the SOP for the procedures relating to banking. The very first one included the approval and release of payments at the bank. These payments constitute CRA biweekly payments, stipends and other administrative transactions.

Further Development: After continued discussion with staff members, we came to the consensus that making SOPs for each role can be very useful for incoming executives. Hence, with a deadline of february; all executive councillors were tasked to make SOPs that are relevant to their respective roles. I have worked on the following so far-

- Email arrangement and Labels
- Key contacts for the role
- Checking and proofreading the work reports
- Use of Calendars and Drive
- Recurring meeting schedule and Prep Work

WUSC x SFSS Scholarship Working Group

Some background of WUSC: World University Services Canada SFU (WUSC SFU) is a student-led club that supports education for refugee youth whose goals are to increase awareness about forced migration and the impact of education on the lives of those affected among youth refugee students. They re-settle the refugee students that SFU students sponsor through a partnership with WUSC Canada.

The Project: In the last board term of 2020-2021, WUSC requested that SFSS offer two scholarships per term: one for a domestic student with a refugee background and one for a domestic Black student. In accordance with the beliefs and policies of SFSS which are to provide access to post-secondary education for all students, the idea was welcomed with open arms and the motion was passed in April, 2021.

As a part of my campaign this year- I promised to work towards finding and providing resources to support marginalised students to support education for all, I joined this working group to offer suggestions and a helping hand. In the seven meetings held during the past two semester, VP Equity and Sustainability- Marie Haddad, VP Internal and Developmental Organization- Corbett Gildersleve and I have worked with SFU WUSC in completing the process of developing this scholarship with consideration of tuition increase and appropriate logistics, including the creation of the selection committee. Previously, we spoke to SFU to see if we could post this on their Financial Aids and Awards page. But, there are some issues with making this available to part-time students as well (which is currently not an option in any of the awards offered by SFU's Financial Aid and Awards Office). Hence, we are looking at the logistics of advertising this directly on the SFSS website. This project has had very few updates over the course of the last semester due to prioritisation of other

important Projects. Details can be checked in my previous and upcoming work reports.

Joint Operations Working Group

It is a group composed of Executives from SFU, Graduate Student Society and Simon Fraser Student Society. The meetings are a place for discussion of issues and updates provided by members of all three groups. The agenda for meetings change from time to time and include topics like student housing issues, international student enrolment and its financial implications (options available for their support to travel back/ take online courses), Federal election (polling booth on campus to get a large turnover of votes), welcome day for the fall semester (safety precautions in place for students/ social distancing/ sanitization), EDI update, steering committee on safety consultation and international student survey results. Spring 2022 return to campus, SUB closure, hybrid mode of instruction for all classes as a part of the accessible course practices campaign, mask and vaccination mandates, rapid testing on campus etc.

This allows all the three groups to present their updates and work on issues and concerns collectively. Throughout the semester, suggestions on various agenda items were discussed with the working group and reported back to the executive committee.

Student Union Building and COVID Safety Working Group

The Student Union Building and COVID-19 Safety Working Group has been active since the Student Union Building opened this year and its members include Building Manager, Building Coordinators, Management Staff and the Executive Committee Members. With the surge in COVID-19 case numbers over the winter months, the Working group started meeting from time to time to assess the COVID-19 situation on campus to provide a safe working environment for our staff members as well as frame rules and regulations to keep the Building running smoothly.

Initially the SUB was kept running at the same capacity (as prior to holidays) and a review of the capacity was suggested when the students returned to campus on the 24th January, 2022 so that a further decision could be made then based on usage, number of COVID-19 cases and Public Health Orders. The communications department was given a list of restrictions that were to be followed in the building so that it could be relayed to the student membership on different social media platforms and also posted across the building.

To keep social distancing effective, some areas were kept as single occupancy (like the Level 4 and 5) and others were designated for group work so that chairs would not be moved (Level 3). Single occupancy study desks were placed in the Ballroom to give more study space for the students.

Budget Planning and Consultation for 2022-2023

After the Annual General Meeting, I started to find areas in the budget that were left unused or have been historically underused (in the last 3 years). This gave me an initial perspective about what changes could be made in the budget for the upcoming fiscal year 2022-2023. In addition, I also checked the spending of the committees to better understand how and what they use their funds to increase or decrease the amounts based on usage. This will allow for the allocation of those funds to line items that are overspent or have evolving use in the coming year as we gradually return to more in-person tasks.

Over the coming months, I will be speaking to Executive Committee Members, the Councillors and Constituency groups and ask about any suggestions and concerns that they may have.

Faculty of Science Dean Hiring Committee

SFU requested SFSS to nominate a committee member on their behalf to represent undergraduate students and their needs on the Hiring Committee. Given my major and experience as a student in the Faculty of Science for the last 4 years, I was chosen to serve as an Undergraduate member on the committee.

The initial meetings of the committee served as a meet and greet session for all the members on the committee and as introductions about their role and responsibilities within the faculty. This allowed everyone to give a holistic view of what qualities they would be looking for in the potential candidates.

Development of a Need-based Grant for International Students

When I started my role, I was committed to do something that helped the International students with their finances. The reason I specifically say International Students is that they are excluded from being able to take any education loans in Canada and there are criteria for various National and Provincial scholarships or grants that do not consider entries from International students. This leaves them with very little options for getting Financial Aid.

Another reason for the need of one such grant is the 3-4 fold higher cost of tuition for International students which makes it very hard for them to sustain on scholarships or bursaries. While I am also hoping to bring an increment to the bursaries offered by SFSS for the Domestic students, I have been researching if other universities have an option of a need-based grant for International students per se (especially for those who do not qualify for scholarships). My vision is to have no GPA requirements for this grant so that it is accessible to all students.

Poster Boards Replacement Project

Background: During the previous years, some bulletin boards and poster boards at SFU have been managed and cleaned up by the SFSS. An unofficial working agreement was made back in 2016 via email, which allowed SFSS to use the bulletin boards listed with pictures in accordance to the University's Policy on appropriate use of bulletin boards.

Prior to COVID-19, the Vice President University Relations collaborated with members of SFU to have the old and worn-down poster boards changed and replaced with new ones. But the project was halted due to the pandemic and the current Vice President University and Academic Affairs was approached by SFU to see if we wanted to continue the projects and explore the budget. The Vice President Events and myself also joined and are currently in the process of figuring the logistics and operations around changing the boards.

PAIN POINTS



Hybrid/ Remote Work

Hybrid/ Remote work meant tons of time spent on screen. This was one of the biggest challenges for me this semester (terrible pain in the eyes 24*7). I found it difficult to connect with people as in-person talks (that hardly take 5 minutes) became long emails of asking questions and answering them back and forth. It can get frustrating for both parties when you are trying to work on an important task which takes longer than anticipated because of the nature of the work environment (work from home/ remote). This slows down the pace of work considerably. Some executives were able to return back to office but the majority of us were either working in a hybrid model or remotely.

Work Life Balance and Burnout

I have tried to keep away from emails and SFSS tasks over the weekend but somehow I am always tempted to work on them. Compared to the last semester, I have had a much better Work Life Balance and hence less burnout. But, as we transition into Spring, I can see many overlapping deadlines approaching which will cause burnout on some days (leaving us feeling fatigued).

Not Meeting quorum at Committee Meetings

Quite a few Committee chairs reported that their committee meetings lacked quorum. I have faced this issue as well since a few councillors resigned in fall and the committee found it hard to have regular meetings due to the largely in-person aspect of classes after about 1.5 years or remote of hybrid learning. This semester involved transitioning back to school and hence schedules were all over the space. To resolve this issue for my committee, I reached out to councillors before onboarding new members onto the committee so that the expectations were clear ahead of time.

RECOMMENDATIONS



- Do chunks of your work reports daily!

I cannot stress enough how important it is to keep on top of your work reports. There is a very high chance of forgetting important details of meetings for the summary portion of the report if these are done last minute. It is also a great practice to avoid last minute stress.

- Use a calendar

This is one of the best tips I have received from my fellow executive members. Having a calendar and keeping a track of your work related commitments allows you to figure out blocks of time to study and keep up with coursework. It is also a great tool for knowing the schedules of your colleagues (you can sync your calendars). It has been a breeze to plan out meeting times when you know the availability for council members you wish to collaborate with (avoids the need of doodle polls, when2meet etc)

- Prioritise your Mental and Physical Health

Good mental and physical health are important for doing your job well. If you are feeling low or unsupported, reach out to your team, tell them about your feelings and struggles and never be afraid to ask for help.

If you keep stressing and pushing yourself, you will be burnt out and fall back on things (so take a break when you need it!).

- Work on projects that excite you (and benefit the student body) and look for like-minded individuals to collaborate with

One of the issues that you might face in the role is to look for projects that not only stand out to you but are also meaningful to the student body. The next hard step is to find council members who can assist you and provide input where needed. It is extremely important that you ask about people's capacities before you hand on work to them.

I have found it helpful to make a list of projects and then prioritise them based of the amount of time and labour it will take to complete it, what chunk of the student body will be benefitted and how achievable the project is.