

simon fraser
student society

**EXECUTIVE
OFFICER'S
SEMESTER
REPORT**



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**VP University &
Academic Affairs**
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Completed Projects

On-going Projects

Pain Points

Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Hi there! My name is Serena Bains (they/she) and I am your Vice-President University and Academic Affairs (VP UAA) for the 2021-2022 year. My second semester as VP UAA felt hectic, disorganized and reactive. I feel as though I was not able to start or finish nearly as many projects compared to the work I completed in my first semester. This was partly due to the fact that I decided to take up one of my recommendations from my Summer term semester report: be proactive in regards to burnout. Thus, instead of working close to one hundred hours biweekly, I began working my required sixty hours biweekly. Although this was definitely a factor in comparatively starting and completing less projects, I believe that the unpredictability of the semester was the main culprit. Constantly having to react to the orders outlined by the Public Health Officer (PHO), the fifth wave as a result of the Omicron variant and Simon Fraser University's (SFU) varying delivery of education and services, all while being in the first "in-person" semester since the start of the pandemic, caused very little time to be left to focus on any new or existing projects.

Unfortunately, this extended to committees as well as the Accessibility Committee (AC) and the University and Academic Affairs Committee (UAAC) only met a handful of times over the Summer, where some meetings did not meet quorum. Regardless, progress was made on projects related to both the AC and UAAC, especially with the help of Brianna Price the Accessibility Coordinator.

Given what has been mentioned above, it is fair to assume that one of the pain points for the Fall semester was constantly having to react to circumstances outside of our control. Another pain point was fatigue from being online, isolated and worried for the health of myself, my family and my community as a result of the Omicron variant. I recommend accepting the things one cannot change, advocating for change as much as possible and the rest will happen as it is destined to happen.

If the Summer semester was dedicated to gaining knowledge, the Fall semester was dedicated to immediately testing and applying the knowledge I had previously gained. As always I could not have done any of my work without the support of my fellow Executive Officers, Associate Vice-Presidents, Councillors, and Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) Staff. Only one semester left to advocate for and implement changes to best support our members!

COMPLETED PROJECTS



University and Academic Affairs

Community Engagement on Personal Safety Steering Committee

Summary

The Community Engagement on Personal Safety Steering Committee was originally created as a response to the Dining Hall incident, where a Black alumnus was violently arrested on campus. The purpose of the committee was to provide policy recommendations to improve how SFU's campus public safety operates. This purpose was quickly changed without consultation of committee members, where the new goal for the committee was providing recommendations on how to consult the community on policy recommendations in the Fall. The last meeting of the committee occurred on Tuesday October 5th 2021 and the final recommendations were reviewed by the committee before they were presented to the SFU Executive. A "What We Heard" report was also produced by the facilitators of the committee. The report and recommendations were both largely inadequate as they did not accurately reflect the dissatisfaction of the members, the constantly changing scope of the committee, nor did it mention that the committee was created due to a violent and triggering arrest on campus.

Goal

- Continue to provide feedback on SFU campus public safety as consultation with community members occurs.

Results

- Inadequate recommendations and "What We Heard" report presented to the SFU Executive.
- Forced to find other avenues for advocacy efforts to improve policies around SFU campus public safety

Accessibility

Accessibility Consultation Program

Summary

The Accessibility Consultation Program's purpose is to help develop a knowledge base for the accessibility department that is based on lived experience and the testimony of people with a variety of disabilities. The program provides an honorarium of \$322 per person for their labour. Consultations would cover multiple subjects and can look different depending on the needs of the person being consulted, where consultation may seek to gain knowledge from people with specific disabilities, people who use specific accommodations, people with needs that are especially underserved by abled society, and people with particular intersecting identities. The program has now been approved and is ready for use.

Goals

- Developing a knowledge base for the accessibility department that is based on lived experience.
- To fairly compensate folks for their labour, time and knowledge.

Result

- A ready-to-use consultation program that fairly compensates disabled people.

ON-GOING PROJECTS



University and Academic Affairs

Grading Scheme

Summary

During the Summer semester, two SFU students created and shared a petition titled “Adjustments to SFU’s Transcript and Grading System.” After meeting with the students in question, we took this item to the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies (SCUS), where the topic was researched by the registrar and the resulting findings were presented to the committee. The findings included the following: the potential disadvantage for SFU students when applying for graduate school compared to students from other institutions that use percentage grades and nonuniformity across post-secondary institutions rather than a standardized grading practice. SCUS agreed that an overhaul of the grading system is not the answer, but a more detailed review of when grades are applied, investigating the principles and practices of SFU grading and greater transparency and consistency in grading practices. Over the next year work will begin on redesigning the grading scale along with defining what is an average student.

Goals

- Add percentages to SFU’s grading transcripts.
- Greater transparency and consistency in grading practices.

Next Steps

- Follow up on this item at future SCUS meetings for updates on what work has been done.
- If the work being done requires Senate approval, push for this item to be brought to the Senate as a formal motion.

Student Affordability Working Group

Summary

The Student Affordability Working Group (SAWG) is a group that reports directly to the Joint Operations Group (JOG). The purpose of SAWG is for the Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS), the Graduate Student Society (GSS) and SFU to work together on reducing non-tuition costs associated with post-secondary education. In the past the group has worked on initiatives, such as, open educational resources (OER), food security, student housing, financial predictability, etc. Most recently, a student affordability audit has been completed and the terms of reference for the group are being revised.

Goal

- Improve student affordability for all direct and indirect costs associated with attending post-secondary education outside of tuition costs.

Next Step

- Continue attending the SAWG and advocating for greater affordability.

Undergraduate Survey

Summary

A SFSS undergraduate survey is done annually to determine the composition of the student population, their needs, any areas where the SFSS could improve, and where greater advocacy is needed. Associate Vice-President Priyanka Dhesa has worked to create an undergraduate survey for the 2021-2022 year. The survey is complete and is awaiting release. The release date of the survey has been postponed due to other surveys being prioritized, an example is the COVID-19 survey, which was recently distributed to membership.

Goals

- To gain data regarding the composition of the student population, their needs, any areas where the SFSS could improve, and where greater advocacy is needed.
- Create and release a report regarding what the priorities of the SFSS should be for the next year based on the data from the survey.

Next Steps

- Set a new release date for the survey.
- Analyze survey data, create and release a report.
- Recommend SFSS priorities based on the results of the report.

Accessibility

Accessibility Bursary

Summary

The accessibility bursary is a project that was started during the 2020-2021 year under the AC as a way to make greater use of the Accessibility Fund. The Accessibility Fund is greatly underutilized and an accessibility bursary would provide an incredibly valuable service for self-identified disabled students. The bursary could be used to cover any costs associated with one's access needs. For example, hearing aids, therapies, mobility aids, ramps, etc. The bursary is currently awaiting feedback and approval from lawyers and can be implemented immediately thereafter with the approval of the AC.

Goals

- To make greater use of the Accessibility Fund.
- To remove financial barriers for disabled students so they can better have their accessibility needs met.

Next Steps

- Receive feedback and approval from lawyers.
- Receive approval from the AC.

Accessible and Equitable Events Issues Policy

Summary

The Accessible and Equitable Events Issues Policy would provide a basis in policy for the SFSS to ensure their events are both accessible and equitable. In addition, the policy would also provide resources for folks to understand how to plan events that are safe for all attendees. The policy outlines the purpose for the policy itself, definitions for terms, such as, ableism, accessibility, barriers, etc., and what the SFSS supports and opposes. The policy is currently being developed with the help of

VP Events and Student Affairs Jess Dela Cruz and Accessibility Coordinator Brianna Price. Once the policy is completed, it will be provided to the SFU Disability and Neurodiversity Alliance (DNA) for feedback, the AC for feedback and approval and Council for the notice of motion and final approval.

Goal

- To ensure any events held by the SFSS are safe, accessible and equitable.

Next Steps

- Complete writing the issues policy.
- Send the policy to SFU DNA for feedback.
- Send the policy to the AC for feedback and approval.
- Send in the notice of motion for the issues policy to Council.
- Final approval at the following Council meeting.

Student Union Building (SUB) Accessibility Audit

Summary

The SUB accessibility audit was conducted to determine any possible areas of concerns in terms of accessibility. The audit was conducted by Level Playing Field, who reported that the majority of the building is accessible, however, there are areas of concern. The emergency services, kitchenettes and bathrooms all require changes to meet accessibility standards. Many of the doors within the SUB also require automation as they are heavy and difficult to open. The results of the audit have been discussed at the AC and further action needs to be taken to implement the recommendations outlined in the report.

Goal

- To implement the changes recommended in the report to make the SUB more accessible.

Next Steps

- Speak with the Building Coordinators and Building Assistants to determine which of the recommendations the SFSS can implement.
- Speak with SFU Facilities Services about implementing the recommendations that the SFSS cannot implement on their own.

Miscellaneous

Joint Operations Group (JOG)

Summary

JOG is a monthly meeting between representatives from the SFU administration, the SFSS and the GSS. It is the main method of communication between the student societies and SFU administration, where we lobby for changes on topics that affect the university community. Examples of topics discussed include: enrollment activity, return to campus, flu shot clinics, vaccine clinics, etc.

Goal

- To effectively lobby the university to better represent the needs of students.

Next Step

- Continue attending JOG meetings.

Poster Boards

Summary

Currently there is an informal agreement between the SFSS and SFU regarding which poster boards the SFSS can use. This informal agreement was completed over email in October of 2016. A formal agreement was never created. Recently, I received an email from SFU regarding the poster boards requesting that they be cleaned. This task is currently not under the purview of any of our staff, nor does the informal agreement outline whether the SFSS or SFU Facilities Services would be responsible for this task. A formal agreement needs to be created to determine who is responsible for this task, among defining other details associated with the poster boards as well.

Goal

- To create a formal agreement between the SFSS and SFU regarding the poster boards.

Next Steps

- Reach out to SFU administrators regarding this topic.
- Reach out to SFU Facilities Services to understand their point of view.

SFU Community Free Fridge

Summary

The SFU Community Free Fridge is a safe, low-barrier and non-judgemental way for students, staff and faculty to support each other to reduce waste and to ensure everyone in our community can feed themselves and their families. The fridge operates on the principle of “take something, leave something,” where no registration is required. The fridge is stocked with food twice a week to ensure there is enough food for the community at all times. The fridge is currently located in the SUB and is open during the hours of operation of the SUB. The sponsors of the fridge include: Embark, SFSS, the Burnaby Primary Care Network, Food Mesh, Burnaby Neighbourhood House, SFU Ancillary Services, and SFU’s Office of Community Engagement. Although the fridge is fully operational, this is an ongoing project to ensure that the project is meeting the needs of the community.

Goal

- To provide a low-barrier service for community members experiencing food insecurity.

Next Step

- Ensure that the service continues to effectively meet the needs of the community.

COVID-19 Safety Regroup

Summary

COVID-19 Safety Regroup meetings consist of SFSS Executives and staff, where we discuss any topic related to COVID-19, safety, staff, the SUB, etc. The frequency of the meetings differs depending on the amount of work that needs to be done. For example, while preparing for the COVID-19 Press Conference the group met on a daily basis.

Goal

- To ensure that the safety of community members is maintained amongst COVID-19.

Next Step

- Continue attending COVID-19 Safety Regroup meetings

PAIN POINTS



Unpredictability of the Fall Semester

The Fall semester was significantly more unpredictable than the Summer semester. Whether it was reacting to orders from the PHO, the fifth wave and the new Omicron variant, SFU's varying delivery of education and services, all while trying to adjust to the first fully "in-person" semester since the start of the pandemic, it felt like the amount of work that was created and not planned was insurmountable. Thus, any projects that were planned or in-progress were often deprioritized to address work that had more immediate needs and deadlines. This occurred throughout the semester, which is why it was really difficult to start or complete any new or existing projects.

COVID Fatigue

Now that we are in the n'th year of the pandemic and time no longer exists, it feels like the end will never be in sight. This semester I have continued to experience fatigue from working remotely, staying home as much as possible to protect myself, my family, friends, and community members, and constant COVID anxiety. It can be really demoralizing to feel like none of your actions have any impact and we are stuck in this state of constant illness and death, especially while being disabled and working in advocacy. It puts into question whether the work we do has an impact and once that is in question, it becomes more difficult to be motivated about the work you are doing.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Do What You Can

It is a unique situation to work in advocacy during a pandemic, where more than ever it feels as though a significant proportion of life is out of our control. There are conditions in society that one cannot change, and although there is an air of hopelessness, it is important to do what you can. I recommend accepting the things one cannot change, advocating for change wherever possible and the rest will happen as it is destined to happen. Having the perspective that everything is a movable object with enough pressure will cause unnecessary disappointment when you put in as much effort as possible and do not see any results.