

simon fraser
student society

**EXECUTIVE
OFFICER'S
SEMESTER
REPORT**



Almas Phangura
VP Finance & Services
May 2021 - Aug 2021



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Completed Projects

On-going Projects

Pain Points

Recommendations

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 marginalised groups on campus, improve health and dental plans and fight for affordable education for all.

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. As I plan my meetings for fall with StudentCare, this is a priority for me while negotiating for plans for 2022-2023.

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

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

The summer has been a successful and eventful semester. I have been able to work on a variety of projects that are listed in detail below. I had a smooth transition into the role with the help of my predecessor in the role and was able to acquaint myself with financial procedures like the process of auditing, account reconciliations and learn various financial controls and policies. I am looking forward to working on the procedure of budgeting in the coming semester.

Please see my work reports to read more about my work 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 CPA (financial assistant) to help 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



Making the SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) Sheet

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.

I shall be continuing this over the course of the year to complete the SOP guidebook.

JotForm for Council Work Reports

This year, the constitution of the Board was changed which meant a large increase in the number of work reports submitted for records. It was very time consuming to use Google Drive for containing these reports and accessing them.

To check the submission times and have consistency in the procedure of submitting these reports, JotForm was developed as an easy-to-use platform for all the councillors to submit their reports. Along with the communications department, I oversaw the whole process and gave feedback and suggestions. This was tested and after making the required changes, made available to the members of council. They include sections to display the time spent on different tasks and a dropbox to submit the detailed reports of their work.

Tracking hours of Council Members

The hours tracking sheets were introduced due to the same reason as JotForms Work Reports i.e to keep a record of hours spent by almost 45 council members on their tasks like meeting hours, project hours, administration hours and committee hours. This will allow us to make a database of the work done by all council members. This also allows tracking if members have been consistent with their hours (or working less than the required number of hours as per policies). This ensures transparency and accountability as well (my campaign's platform point).

Financial Audit

The annual financial audit started in May, 2021. It involved supplying documentation required by the auditors, communicating about any queries they had and answering questions from time-to-time about last year's financial decisions. The amortised assets from last year were disposed of after speaking to auditors (and discussing with financial coordinators and Corbett) and following the trend of the previous treasurers and VP Finance. A meeting was set up with the auditing team and SFSS's financial staff and Executive councillors with portfolios related to finance to discuss and go over any key findings and draft statements. Since a lot of the work is still done online, the audit took longer than anticipated.

The financial audit report and draft statements were approved at the council meeting held on 29th September, 2021 after a detailed presentation by the auditors for all council members. The report needs to be signed by the President and VP Finance. Moving forward, a response shall be prepared to the Findings Letter from the Auditor about any issues that were raised.

Majority of these findings are little suggestions to make our financial records more clear to avoid likelihood of errors and simple amendments to finance-related procedures of the society. The auditors reported that no significant difficulties were encountered during the audit and described it a successful fiscal year (Thanks to the VP Finance 2020-2021 Corbett Gildersleve!)

Student Union Building Working Group

This working group was formed by the last year's board members and tasked with developing and recommending plans to the Council on actions to take pertaining to the opening of the Student Union Building. One of the main tasks was to find a date of opening the space to students and the public. The council approved 23rd August, 2021 as the opening day. Various events were planned by VP Events Jess Dela Cruz as a part of soft-opening during the week of 23rd August.

Emergency Action Plans were drafted and some information was taken from the pre-existing plans. Several sub groups were formed under the main working group to ensure division of labour. Next up, a discussion was held around the opening hours (open it on the weekdays for now and then move to the weekends). Discussion around the staff needed to run the building (and their duties) was held. A gradual return to work plan was prepared for our current staff.

Keeping in mind the Public Health Orders due to COVID-19, safety protocols and procedures were put into place. This included who could access the building (and at

what phase of opening) and rules around in-person meetings. The communications were given the responsibility of spreading the word to students about the opening. Room bookings for students was a major topic of discussion. It was decided that an online portal would be the best way to ensure access to all students and maintain an easy-to-book system. All spaces were categorised into two tiers based on their size and capacity. Lastly, policies around space user guidelines and penalties were discussed.

ON-GOING PROJECTS



Building Assistant Hiring Committee

The goal of the Building Assistant Hiring Committee is to hire 8-10 Building Assistants to ensure the smooth working of the Student Union Building. The committee is composed of two employer representatives, myself and Ayesha Khan and two SFSS Staff Members Melanie Ling, Nancy Mah and Shelly Durante (alternate).

The posting was open for about 2.5 weeks. Around 19 applications were received, of which 16 applicants qualified for the role. 12 applicants who passed the pre-screening stage were invited for interviews which took place in the first week of September. I have been given the responsibility to check their references. Further updates will be provided in the monthly and next semester report once the hiring is complete.

Bullying and Case Manager Hiring Committee

The SFSS was invited to send a representative from their end for the Bullying and Case Manager Hiring Committee by SFU. The committee was led by CJ Rowe. Other members are Marie Haddad, Melinda Sakura, Michelle Allison, Michelle Verbrugge, Jennifer Scott and Hafsa. This is an important role as it aims to create a safer and more inclusive campus environment.

The committee met twice to discuss who should be called in for interviews out of the 10 candidates that were shortlisted by CJ from 30 candidates. In the first meeting, all members took the time to go through different applicant's portfolios and came up with their top 5 applicants. In the second meeting, 3 candidates were invited for interviews by mutual consent and another candidate was short-listed to offer a backup interview (if need be).

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 three meetings held during the past 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. At present, we are speaking to SFU to see if we can post this on their Financial Aids and Awards pages and figuring out other logistics. Details to come in next semester reports and 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 etc.

Internal Communications Working Group

This group has been formed to ensure proper communication between staff of SFSS and executive council members. The staff members give an update of what they are working on and what support would be required to successfully complete the task. The executive committee is looking to expand the scope of this by proposing meetings of executive councillors with staff relevant to their portfolios. This will further improve communication channels and increase the pace of tasks.

Annual General Meeting Preparation

An important report at the AGM is the report from VP Finance outlining the financial condition of the society (keep in mind the auditor's findings and recommendations) and updates from the previous fiscal year. I suggested ways to improve student engagement in the AGM since it shall be held virtually . As per my platform, I promised to present the society's financial information in clear, simple and easy to understand figures and numbers. I prepared spreadsheets to add to SFSS's financial database and made figures to relay that information to students on the AGM.

PAIN POINTS



Remote Work

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 slowed down the pace of work considerably.

Work Life Balance and Burnout

My course load, research project, volunteering commitments and an unforeseen leave of absence during the first month threw my outline for the semester outside the window. I was working late nights to catch-up on what I missed during my LOA and balancing it with school and other commitments which left me craving for some “free time”. I would be lying if I say it was not depressing on some days. I have tried to keep away from emails and SFSS tasks over the weekend but somehow I am always tempted to work on them.

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).

- 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!).