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**student society**

**EXECUTIVE  
OFFICER'S  
SEMESTER  
REPORT**



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May 2021 - Aug 2021



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# 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 first semester as VP UAA was a busy one, where I was mostly focused on ensuring the transition from remote learning to in-person learning was just, equitable and accessible. This effort culminated in the Access for All campaign, but I was also able to start and complete multiple projects simultaneously that I will describe in more detail in this semester report.

In addition, I am currently chairing the Accessibility and University and Academic Affairs Committees, while also being a member of the Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC), Equity and Sustainability and the Surrey Campus Committees.

Another result of my first semester as an Executive Officer is the onboarding of the first Associate Vice-Presidents University and Academic Affairs under the new [Council policies](#). The projects and labour they have put into the University and Academic Affairs portfolio has been an important part of the progress made in the Summer semester and will continue to be going forward.

Of course, my first four months in this position had multiple pain points as well: managing my mental health, work, school, volunteering, and personal life; struggling with delegation and transitioning from remote to in-person work have all proved difficult.

Learning from these experiences though, is what will make the next semesters to come less stressful and intimidating. I recommend being proactive about taking breaks, communicating with team members and staff regularly, managing my hours worked, delegating tasks more effectively, having office hours, and planning a transition to in-person work.

I have learned a ton in my first semester as VP UAA and I truly could not have started and completed these projects without the support of my fellow Executive Officers, Associate Vice-Presidents, Councillors, and Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) Staff. I am looking forward to continuing our work together in the semesters to come.

# COMPLETED PROJECTS



## University and Academic Affairs

### Onboarding Associate Vice-Presidents

#### Summary

The [SFSS Council policies](#) adopted on April 23rd 2021 established R-17: Associate Vice-Presidents, which allows Vice-Presidents to appoint Associate Vice-Presidents to assist in the duties of their respective Executive Office. Where the duties and obligations of Associate Vice-Presidents are as follows: assist their supervising Vice-President in the execution of programs and policies of Council as they pertain to that Vice-President's portfolio, at the request of their supervising Vice-President attend meetings as necessary, provide recommendations and advice on policy options, and have other powers and duties as assigned by their supervising Vice-President. This resulted in the 2021-2022 Executive Committee to be the first Executive Officers to have Associate Vice-Presidents to aid with their duties.

#### Goals

- Appoint a minimum of one Associate Vice-President University and Academic Affairs to aid with the University and Academic Affairs portfolio.
- Sufficiently train appointed Associate Vice-President(s) so they can adequately fulfill their role.
- Provide multiple projects to Associate Vice-President(s) over the course of the 2021-2022 year.

#### Results

- Priyanka Dhesa was appointed as the first Associate Vice-President University and Academic Affairs at the May 7th 2021 Executive Committee meeting.
- Hanah Bazzi was appointed as the second Associate Vice-President University and Academic Affairs at the June 8th 2021 Executive Committee meeting.

- Both Associate Vice-Presidents have chosen and are working towards completing their respective projects.

## Accessibility

### Accessibility Forms

#### Summary

Many of the forms required to access the Accessibility Fund or to make spaces more accessible were inaccessible in of themselves. The Accessibility Vendor List, Accessible In-Person Events Checklist, Accessible Online Events Checklist, SFSS Accessibility Grant Appeal Form, SFSS Accessibility Grant Application, SFSS Accessibility Grant Evaluation Criteria, SFSS Accessibility Grant Guidelines, and the SFSS Accessibility Grant Post Event Report have all undergone remediation and plan language services to make them accessible. These changes cost a total of \$9,922.37, which was paid for through the Accessibility Fund.

#### Goal

- To ensure the accessibility of accessibility related forms.

#### Result

- The aforementioned forms are now all accessible to anyone who uses them.

### Accessibility Standard Policy

#### Summary

The Accessibility Standard Policy is aimed at ensuring any accessibility-related items at the SFSS are standardized and to provide guidelines and resources to improve accessibility. The policy has been passed and there is a coming-into-force date of one year to allow for changes and to update the appendices of the policy. The appendices and definition are now complete.

#### Goals

- Provide a standard for any accessibility-related items.
- Provide guidelines and resources to improve the SFSS' accessibility.

## Result

- Standard policy, guidelines and resources that have created the foundation for the SFSS to continue to improve on its accessibility.

## Psychoeducational Assessment Policies

### Summary

Psychoeducational assessments involve psychological testing to analyze a person's mental processes that underlie their educational performance. A psychoeducational assessment can help students in need identify areas of strength and weakness in their learning profile and obtain a deeper understanding of their educational abilities, as well as assisting with any academic accommodations they may wish to request through SFU's Centre for Accessible Learning. Psychoeducational assessments may cover learning assessments for Specific Learning Disorders, and assessments for other conditions such as ADHD. Psychoeducational assessments are very expensive and at times can exceed \$3,000, which is why it is important to ensure that psychoeducational assessments are covered under StudentCare. Now, psychoeducational assessments are covered up to 80% by StudentCare, however, it does dip into the \$500 psychology benefit first. These assessments do not require a referral. Once there has been sufficient use of the new coverage of the assessments a survey will be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the pilot project.

### Goals

- To make psychoeducational assessments affordable to all students.
- To allow students to access the assessments they need to access the Centre for Accessible Learning's services.

## Result

- Psychoeducational assessments are covered up to 80% by StudentCare.

## Miscellaneous

### Protests in Colombia

#### Summary

Since April 28th 2021, a series of protests have occurred in Colombia. These protests are in response to a tax bill proposed by the government of President Iván

Duque Márquez. The tax reform would apply a value-added tax (VAT) on food, utilities, wages, pensions, and other basic necessities, which would disproportionately impact the working class.

Although the tax bill sparked the protests, outrage had been building for years. The killing of social and environmental leaders, corruption, lack of support for a peace treaty, economic policies that favoured the rich and punished the poor, mass displacement of people from their homes, a ban on forced coca eradication, privatization of health care, earlier tax increases, and a lack of support from the government during the pandemic.

Unions, university students, teachers, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous groups, and members of the working class have been at the forefront of these protests. Where their demands have included the withdrawal of the tax bill, free post-secondary education, an increase in the universal basic income, the government to pay longstanding debts to the most vulnerable in society, such as Indigenous and Afro Latino people, additional support for small businesses, a ban on using glyphosate-based herbicides, that police be held accountable for excessive violence used during the ongoing demonstrations, the withdrawal of a proposal to further privatise the country's healthcare system, the demilitarization of the protest, and for negotiations with the protest leaders to begin.

The demand to withdraw the tax bill has been successful and university students who are in the poorest classes have been provided a semester of free tuition. The wins have come at the cost of approximately 50 deaths at the hands of police and the injury of hundreds and the disappearances of hundreds as well.

On June 2nd 2021 the SFSS Council carried a motion titled "Protests in Colombia," which struck a Colombian Solidarity Working Group tasked with drafting a statement on the ongoing protests in Colombia. This statement was completed on July 11th 2021, where it was addressed to the federal government of Canada and the provincial government of British Columbia. The statement had three main calls to action: that the federal government put emphasis on the calls to action of the Colombian people, that the federal government also put pressure on Colombia to investigate the death of protestors and allow international observers and that the provincial government acknowledges our concerns and helps put pressure on the federal government to meet our demands. The statement has been sent out to the appropriate federal and provincial officials.

## Goals

- To bring awareness to the dire situation in Colombia and the demands of the Colombian protests.
- To demand that the federal and provincial governments support the people of Colombia.
- To stand in solidarity with the people of Colombia in their protest against the Colombian government.

## Results

- Greater awareness of the protests in Colombia.
- Completed a statement in solidarity with the people of Colombia, which was sent to the federal and provincial governments.



# ON-GOING PROJECTS



## University and Academic Affairs

### Access for All

#### Summary

Access for All is a campaign originally created and spearheaded by the University of Victoria (UVIC) Society for Students with a Disability (SDD) in response to the release of the [COVID-19 Return-to-Campus Primer](#) published on April 30th 2021. The Primer claimed to be informed by a “commitment to protecting the health, safety, and well-being of the campus community...” yet the plan outlined disproportionately impacted disabled, neurodivergent, international, women, mature, and Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) students. On May 11th 2021 I introduced this campaign to the SFSS to begin to create a province-wide approach as the Primer was created in collaboration with all post-secondary institutions in British Columbia. The campaign outlined the impacts the proposed return-to-campus plans would have on our community members, while outlining possible avenues of pressure. An Access for All Working Group was created through Council, where the working group drafted and sent letters to the province and Simon Fraser University (SFU) administrators. The letters outlined multiple demands, most of which were met, while some have not been met yet.

#### Goals

- To have a campaign where we could advocate for a safe, equitable and accessible return-to-campus.
- To write letters outlining our demands to the university and province and pressure them to meet our demands.

#### Next Steps

- Determine the next iteration of the Access for All campaign as some demands are still not met.

## Grading Scheme

### Summary

In May of 2021, two SFU students created and posted a petition titled “Adjustments to SFU’s Transcript and Grading System.” The petition currently has 1,291 signatures, where it seeks to implement two changes: add percentages to SFU’s transcripts and to change SFU’s grading scale to match other post-secondary institutions’ scales. I met with the students in question and discussed possible next steps. We agreed that taking this item to the SFU Senate was most appropriate. Currently, the topic is being researched by the registrar and will be presented to the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies on October 14th 2021.

### Goals

- Add percentages to SFU’s transcripts.
- Change SFU’s grading scale to match other post-secondary institutions.

### Next Steps

- Attend the next Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies meeting.
- Push for this item to be brought to the whole of the Senate as a formal motion.

## Open Educational Resources

### Summary

Open educational resources (OER) refers to openly licensed and freely available textbooks, readings, multi-media files, software, games, assessment tools, and even entire courses. OER are listed under the public domain free from copyright restrictions and can be shared, remixed, and used for commercial and non-commercial purposes. OER greatly reduces the cost of course materials for students and thus helps eliminate barriers to education by moving from expensive commercial textbooks to freely available materials. This semester the SFSS Council approved [Issues Policy-10: Course Materials](#) which outlines that the SFSS supports OER and opposed expensive textbooks and digital tools, among other things. It is important to continue this work, as we now have the foundation for advocating for greater OER in the future.

### Goals

- Remove barriers to education by making course materials more affordable and accessible.

- Create a basis through which further advocacy for OER can occur.

### Next Steps

- Continue working with the library's OER working group to learn more about OER initiatives and ways OER can be further implemented at SFU.
- Bring further OER initiatives to Council to further decrease the cost of course materials at SFU.

## Student Affordability Working Group

### Summary

The Student Affordability Working Group develops and discusses any possible initiatives that would make students' experiences at SFU more affordable. The group has worked on initiatives like OER, increasing food security and improving student housing affordability in the past. The group is currently undergoing a transitional period, where the terms of reference for the group needs to be revised so new projects can be taken on.

### Goals

- Improve student affordability at SFU in all aspects.

### Next Steps

- Research practical ways to make the working group more efficient and effective.
- Decide on a definition of affordability to create principles for the group from.

## Undergraduate Survey

### Summary

A SFSS undergraduate survey is done every year to determine the composition of the student population, what their needs are and any areas where improvement and advocacy is needed. Associate Vice-President Priyanka Dhesa has worked extensively to create an undergraduate survey for the 2021-2022 year. The survey is complete and is awaiting release.

### Goals

- Have a clearer understanding of the composition of the student population for this year.

- Determine what the needs of students are and any areas where greater advocacy is needed.

### Next Steps

- Set a release date for the survey.
- Analyze survey results and create a report.
- Begin new projects based on the needs of the student population.

## Withdrawal Under Extenuating Circumstances

### Summary

Withdrawal under extenuating circumstances (WE) is an academic concession, where students experiencing [“unexpected and uncontrollable events that seriously threaten \[the student’s\] academic obligations; \[and\] make it difficult to complete an academic program”](#) can withdraw from courses with a WE on their transcript.

Currently, the grounds for such a request are medical, employment, compassionate and other. The process for applying for a WE is inaccessible and requires a great deal of documentation. WE’s are currently undergoing a full review by SFU and as a result there is an opportunity to advocate for changes to the process to be implemented. To gain further information about students’ experience with WE’s a survey has been created which is currently awaiting release. This information can in turn be used to advocate for changes to the process to be made.

### Goals

- A more accessible process for WE’s.
- Clearer direction on how to apply for and what situations are considered extenuating circumstances.

### Next Steps

- Set a release date for the WE survey.
- Analyze the results of the survey and create a report.
- Provide the report to SFU administrators and advocate for the changes that students need.

# Accessibility

## Accessibility Bursary

### Summary

The accessibility bursary is a project that was started during the 2020-2021 Accessibility Committee as a way to make greater use of the Accessibility Fund, while providing an invaluable service to students. The bursary would be made available to any student self-identified as disabled who needs an access need to be met. Examples include the following: hearing aids, mobility aids, ramps, therapies, etc. The bursary is currently awaiting approval from lawyers and can be implemented immediately thereafter.

### Goals

- To remove financial barriers to students having their accessibility needs met.
- To make greater use of the Accessibility Fund.

### Next Steps

- Receive approval from lawyers.
- Implement the accessibility bursary.

## 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. Lived experience is defined as the knowledge one gains by having a particular identity and related experience. In this case, lived experience is specific, referring to consultation with people with specific disabilities. For example, consultation may seek to gain knowledge from the following populations: 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 cost of the program is a \$322 honorarium per person as a flat rate.

### Goals

- To appropriately compensate folks for their labour.

- To create greater incentives for consultation with people with disabilities.

### Next Steps

- Receive approval of the program from the SFSS Executive Committee and/or Council.

## Centre for Accessible Learning

### Summary

A campaign regarding improving the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) is much needed and is currently in the ideation stage. Students have many complaints about how CAL operates, their limitations and how ableist a service that claims to help students with disabilities is. Associate Vice-President Hanah Bazzi is currently gathering feedback from students with disabilities to determine what the basis of the campaign should be.

### Goals

- To improve the services of the CAL for students with disabilities.

### Next Steps

- Further consultation with students with disabilities.
- Write a briefing note to present to the SFSS Executive Committee and Council.

## Student Union Building Accessibility Audit

### Summary

The new Student Union Building (SUB) has now opened its doors to the SFU community. It's important to conduct an accessibility audit of the building to determine any possible areas of concern for students with disabilities. The accessibility audit was completed by Level Playing Field, who determined that most of the building is accessible, but there are some major areas of concern. The bathrooms, kitchenettes and emergency services all require upgrades to make them more accessible. Not to mention that many of the doors in the SUB are heavy and require to be opened manually. The results of the audit are yet to be discussed and next steps are to be determined.

### Goals

- Determine the current accessibility of the SUB.

- Make the appropriate changes to the building to make it more accessible.

### Next Steps

- Discuss the results of the audit with the Accessibility Committee.
- Outline next steps for improving the accessibility of the building.

## Miscellaneous

### Community Engagement on Personal Safety Steering Committee

#### Summary

The Community Engagement on Personal Safety Steering Committee has morphed from a committee focused on policy recommendations to providing consultation on how to consult the community on policy recommendations in the Fall. There has been a lot of conflict and resignations resulting from this committee, making it increasingly laborious. Currently the committee is working on finalizing recommendations to SFU administration regarding the outcomes of the committee. This includes the dissatisfaction with the change in scope of the committee, the fact that policy recommendations should be made and that the groups that need to be consulted are the Black and Indigenous folks that were harmed in this process. The committee is coming to a close as the last meeting is occurring this week.

#### Goals

- To implement policy recommendations regarding SFU's campus public safety
- To improve safety for Black and Indigenous community members.

#### Next Steps

- Finalize recommendations to SFU administration.
- Participate in the consultation process that will occur in the Fall.

### SFU Community Free Fridge

#### Summary

The SFU community free fridge launched this past Tuesday in the SUB. The pilot project builds and enhances food security for the SFU community by providing a low-barrier way for community members to take food if they need it and leave food if they have extra. The fridge is open to anyone who can access it and is open during

the SUB operating hours. The sponsors of SFU's community free fridge include: Embark, SFSS, the Burnaby Primary Care Network, Food Mesh, Burnaby Neighbourhood House, SFU Ancillary Services, and SFU's Office of Community Engagement.

## Goals

- Improve food security for the SFU community.
- Provide a low-barrier way for community members to support each other and reduce waste.

## Next Steps

- Come up with a memorandum of understanding to outline who is responsible for what aspects of the program.
- Continue to communicate with the SFU Office of Community Engagement to receive updates on the progress of the pilot program.



# PAIN POINTS



## Delegation

Before entering this role, I was aware that I have difficulty accepting help from others, but I didn't realize the extent of it until now. Whether I was in a working group or committee, I would often assign myself the action items and not even ask if other folks had capacity to help. This is a tried and true way to burnout, trust me. No amount of time-blocking or productivity videos were going to help me complete all of these tasks on my own.

## Managing Multiple Commitments

As someone who likes to stay overwhelmingly busy, I always have multiple commitments, whether it be work, school, volunteering, items in my personal life, etc. As a result, being in a position that has such an all encompassing impact on my life was nerve wracking. I felt as though the balance I had created previous to taking on this work had been thrown off significantly and I found it difficult to get back on track. For every item that piled up in other areas of my life, two were added to the pile from my role as Vice-President University and Academic Affairs. Eventually this became incredibly difficult and overwhelming.

## Bodymind

I underestimated the impact this position would have on my bodymind, as the increased stress caused flare-ups of my disabilities which in turn impacted the rest of my wellbeing. This had a domino effect on all of the other pain points I've mentioned in this report, making it more difficult to delegate tasks, manage multiple commitments and transition to in-person work. I'm learning that stress is an inherent responsibility of this position, but there are coping skills and mechanisms that can be better implemented to mitigate this effect.

## Transitioning To In-Person Work

The Student Union Building (SUB) opening and the restarting of in-person courses brought about the transition from remote to in-person work. A transition that I have not made quite yet and that frankly I'm not ready for. I miss my colleagues and SFSS staff dearly, but the anxiety around transitioning to in-person work is debilitating. There are so many unknowns, that I find it difficult to even contemplate going to my office on the Burnaby campus. Still, I am hopeful that I will be able to join everyone on the mountain sooner rather than later.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



## Be Proactive

The majority of burnout can be attributed to decisions that were not made earlier. It's important to be proactive to avoid the stress and resulting burnout that comes with a decision that one was forced to make. I can be better at proactively taking breaks, communicating that I'm busy or unavailable and sticking to my office hours. In addition, it's important to recognize that the position of any Vice-President is thirty hours a week, where working any greater amount of time is volunteering and is not always necessary. Are there weeks where an item has to get done and I work a few extra hours? Of course. But it's not a smart practice in the long run, as it results in burning out much faster as work expands to fill the time one provides. This is why I've found it very useful to recognize that six hours a day, five days a week is all that is required of me and anything further is welcomed, but unnecessary.

## Delegate

People are here to help, delegate! Folks are more than happy to help take on some amount of responsibility to contribute to a task, I just have to ask. Not delegating is an individualistic viewpoint that minimizes the power of the collective coming together to work on a project. My fellow Vice-Presidents, Associate Vice-Presidents and SFSS Staff are all available to help, whether it be a task or having someone to speak to. It's important to recognize that all forms of labour are valid as well. I can delegate a concrete task to one of my team members or a story to relieve stress. None of us are in it alone as long as we provide the opportunity for others to help.

## Transition Slowly

The majority of my stress around transitioning to in-person work comes from the belief that it's all or nothing, that I have to be completely in-person or completely remote, which is not the case. I have started to work in-person at the Surrey office and am slowly moving to Burnaby, while remaining remote some days would be ideal for myself. It's difficult as I don't know when I'm going to have to stay home due to my health, but the unpredictability is just that, something that cannot be controlled. I

can, however, control how, when and where I work. Thus, it would be best to focus on what I can control and not ruminate on what I can't.