
Wednesday, November 23, 2022

Dear SFSS Councillors, Staff and Membership,

This letter is to inform you that as of Wednesday, November 23, 2022, I will be resigning as President of the Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS). My resignation shall take effect as of 2:30pm today.

Serving as SFSS President has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my undergraduate career. It has been an absolute privilege to have worked with a group of passionate student leaders who aim to shed light on issues impacting students on the daily – such as the issue of housing unaffordability, food insecurity, sexual violence prevention and the need for prayer-space accessibility. I'm also extremely grateful to have used my time in the SFSS to further restore relations with the University, so that both of our organizations can continue to work together and make positive impacts within the membership we commonly share.

Above all, I am thankful to be cherishing the meaningful connections made with all of our hardworking staff in the SFSS. As student leaders come and go on the yearly from this organization, our staff members are the ones who are left behind and work tirelessly to keep the ship from sinking. They truly are the legacy of the SFSS, and I am extremely grateful to have worked with the most resilient group of people I have ever met.

While there are many positives to note while serving an organization like the SFSS, there are also downfalls to consider. The downfalls of being elected into the role of an Executive Officer of the Society, and especially being elected to work under the current governance model we have, means that there are larger and more onerous responsibilities that SFSS student leaders are expected to take on. This includes dealing with, and attempting to resolve, internal conflict.

As most know, the SFSS faced a tumultuous and exhausting summer semester. At that point in time, Council had requested the resignation and censure of an Executive Officer. That Executive Officer had later then resigned themselves from the Society due to the toxicity forming within the SFSS' work environment. Multiple Councillors were also resigning at this time expressing how the toxicity of the work place was negatively affecting their well-being, and the greater good of the Society's direction. Reflecting back on this, I truly believe that the events of the summer have caused both myself, and multiple leaders within the SFSS, the inability to thrive and flourish to our fullest potential.

With that said, I am now resigning for those same reasons. Since the events of the summer, I have tried my absolute best to redirect the Society by fostering a workplace that promotes kindness, empathy, and collaboration amongst differences. I have tried my best to piece back together the fractures formed within the Executive Committee and within Council. Despite all effort in redirecting the Society into a more positive light, not all members of the Executive Committee and Council share the same vision of a unified Society.

Furthermore, bullying in workplace began to occur. These past two months, I began to feel physically, emotionally and mentally unsafe at work. Because of the bullying, my mental health deteriorated significantly, causing me to be slow and unmotivated in my productivity. Due to the deterioration of my mental health, I feel that I can no longer serve as SFSS President at my fullest potential. Stepping away from this position, I believe, will ensure that I will no longer jeopardize my mental health and well-being.

At this point in time, I fear that the direction of the SFSS is heading away from representing the best interests of our student body by becoming too focused on policy and administration. While these are salient matters that any organization should always consider, the SFSS' primary role should always be driven on student advocacy. The SFSS is a student union; not a government to be rife with punitive bureaucracy.

Moreover, the SFSS is in a position where changes are needed to be made in order to sustain the Society for future years to come. The Society needs to implement solutions to combat bullying within unique workplaces like the SFSS. These past few years, multiple Councillors – including myself when I was the Councillor for Political Science back in 2021 – have resigned due to emotional burnout and exhaustion from enduring a toxic work environment. This year, two Executive Officers have resigned citing this same issue. It would be extremely dysfunctional for the Society, if this pattern of Executive Officer and Councillor resignations were to continue.

The SFSS also needs a knowledgeable and experienced individual who can oversee the Society's well-being and further prevent issues, as seen in this year and those previous, from ever arising again. An Executive Director is someone who could hold Executives Officers, Councillors and staff accountable by ensuring that the Society's services are directed towards the best interests of students at all times. An Executive Director would also be an imperative guide to the Society as they would be better equipped in fields such as human resources, policy and finance, and dealing with internal conflict.

Lastly, the SFSS' work environment perpetuates unhealthy grind culture; not student power. The hours required for this job are 60 hours bi-weekly. Yet, it is a regular occurrence to see Executive Officers working between 80-100+ hours during these work periods. Additionally, Executive Officers are not paid for any time they do over 60 hours. Working 50+ hour weeks, for

what ends up being around minimum wage, is not healthy or sustainable for most people. Let alone students.

I'm saddened that it's come to this, as I intended to complete my full term as President. But everyone has a limit. We are not human machines; we are human beings. I can only hope that Council, for the remainder of the year, will do its best to place its differences aside and work together to better the student experience.

Thank you to all of our members of our SFSS staff and Council for the experience of getting to work with you. Last but certainly not least, I want to thank all the students who entrusted me in representing you as President of the SFSS. I am honoured to have served you this far.

With Gratitude,



Helen Sofia Pahou
SFSS President, May 2022-November 2022