Statement on UBC’s consultation of students on proposed increases to international tuition and Winter Session housing costs

On October 7, 2014, UBC announced to a select group of student leaders that it was considering imposing a 10% increase in tuition next year for incoming international students and a 20% increase on Winter Session housing costs. The Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC Vancouver was informed at this time that a thirty-day consultation would occur on the tuition increase, but not on housing.

The AMS is very concerned about the actual increases being discussed: there is a standing policy opposing tuition increases for both domestic and international students and last year the student body voted 91% in favour of the AMS advocating for lower tuition. However, this letter will focus exclusively on the fact that we are deeply troubled by the consultation process.

Thirty days might be enough time to consult on an increase in international tuition if UBC respected its previous commitment to a 3% per year cap. However, it is far too short to adequately review the 10% currently being considered, especially since we have not been provided with any of the underlying data or reasoning justifying the increase. The time allotted is especially troubling given the fact that the substantial and unexpected housing increase was announced at the same time. However, we are pleased by UBC’s commitment to provide additional public platforms, including holding more than two town halls if necessary, to hear all student opinions. The AMS therefore requests that the consultation period begin only once all requested information has been provided.

Furthermore, it is unclear when the tuition and housing increases were decided upon, and why student leaders were not briefed on the underlying data, assumptions and rationale. The consultation process needs to be an informed process where all information is provided up front. In this regard, we are very troubled that the lack of answers we have received so far reflects a lack of planning on the part of administrators. We are also concerned that a rushed consultation will minimize or even ignore issues linked to access, affordability and equality.

For these reasons, the AMS is expressing its opposition to the approach the administration is taking in consulting students on this significant tuition increase. We are especially concerned that no consultations will be held about the increase in housing costs. We must receive adequate rationale on the necessity for any increases and detailed budget breakdowns of how any additional revenues will be allocated within the wider University budget. In particular, the AMS seeks concrete evidence of how these additional funds will be used to directly improve academic life and student housing, while respecting issues linked to access, affordability and equality. We also request an increased period for consultation and ask the university to honour its commitment to broaden and deepen its consultation of students. Any major changes to tuition levels and campus housing fees must be accompanied by a robust conversation and adequate rationale to insure that they will be of maximum benefit to students and the rest of the university community.