

GOAL 1: PROVIDE HEALTHY, SAFE, AND EFFICIENT ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENTS

Values: Collaborative Supportive, Optimal

1.1 Housing Affordability and Finances

Campaign Promise: Continue to support the Rent-with-Rights initiative which ensures that rental rights are guaranteed to students across British Columbia.

Reported Goal(s) Progress: In understanding that housing affordability was a key advocacy goal for the Office of the Vice-President of External Affairs, we took several initiatives to deliver on the key performance indicators and action items established during the executive goal-setting process. The Office ensured that the provincial working group - student housing's leading practices resumed its task of completing a best practices manual which will be distributed to student housing providers after completion. The manual has been completed, and its final copy will be delivered to the following Office. The next stage of the leading practices project is student consultation which will be undertaken by the following Office. In understanding that the student housing working group is a provincially established working group that includes student housing providers and student leaders, the provincial government endorses the manual.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the provincial government established the Temporary Rental Support (TRS) program which was designed to support renters monetarily in addition to the rent freeze. The TRS, while it was a supportive measure for many British Columbians, did not provide those living in student housing with rental support as the majority of students were not eligible for the support. As a result, the Office committed towards ensuring that all future rental support programs would include student housing. After extensive lobbying efforts towards the provincial government, a commitment from the Minister responsible for Housing was attained that student housing would not be excluded from further rental support programs^{1 2}.

In understanding that the provincial government's post-elections rent freeze did not include student housing due to student housing's exclusion from the *Residential Tenancy Act*, the Office in coordination with the Vice-President, Academic and University Affairs worked with UBC Student Housing and Community Services ensuring that rents would not be increased on UBC student housing until the provincial government lifted the province-wide rent freeze³. The Office, during its GSS-joint 2021 Provincial Advocacy Week, also advocated to ensure that students would be included in the provincial government's commitment to establishing a COVID-19 renter's rebate.

¹ Green, Paloma. "Eby and Singh duel over defunding police, climate, housing at Vancouver-Point Grey debate". *The Ubysey*. October 15, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.ubyssey.ca/news/vancouver-point-grey-candidates-debate/>

² Maheshka, Charul. "Midterm review: VP External Kalith Nanayakkara faced the unexpected, from election to conflict of interest probe". *The Ubysey*. December 3, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.ubyssey.ca/news/midterm-review-kalith-nanayakkara-vp-external/>

³ Zerrouk, Saphiya. "UBC says it will keep the student housing rent freeze until BC lifts its own". March 13, 2021. *The Ubysey*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ubyssey.ca/news/ubc-commits-to-rent-freeze/>

In coordination with the Student Services Manager, the Office has also been working with UTILE, a non-profit student co-operative housing developer, on a feasibility study to explore the possibility of an AMS-owned housing co-operative. The feasibility study is expected to be completed during the following Office's term and is currently being supported through the FLASH Survey, a province-wide student-centric housing affordability survey.

1.2 Transit Solutions

Campaign Promise: Push the federal and provincial government to commit to building a SkyTrain-to-UBC, past Arbutus; advocate for funding from all stakeholders in the region to fund the business case which is essential to the building of the SkyTrain-to-UBC.

Reported Goal(s) Progress: The U-Pass program has been a key project that the Office has been working on heavily throughout the past year. In understanding that the previous Office suspended the U-Pass program amid the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the current Office ensured that students were well-supported throughout the summer in terms of transit needs for essential services through the AMS Transit Subsidy ⁴. In the fall, the U-Pass suspension was lifted and the program was reinstated with exemption and subsidy categories. First, students living outside of Metro Vancouver would be exempted from the program due to their inability to access the region's transit systems. Second, students who were immunocompromised would be able to apply for exemption through the UBC SSC. Third, students who were facing COVID-19-related and general financial hardship would be able to apply for the AMS U-Pass Subsidy which saw over a thousand students approved for the subsidy. The outgoing Office is currently in conversation with Translink and the BC Government discussing the future of the U-Pass program in the current environment.

The SkyTrain-to-UBC project was another key project that the Office worked on in the past year. Advocacy for the project included submissions to the federal government along with lobbying efforts directed to the provincial government through the 2021 AMS-GSS Provincial Advocacy Week. The federal government, in response to overwhelming support for the SkyTrain-to-UBC among other national infrastructure projects and lobbying efforts from the AMS and other stakeholders, created the Permanent Transit Fund which will begin fund allocations in 2026-2027 ⁵. The Office has also been working with Translink and UBC to promote student engagement in Translink's SkyTrain-to-UBC public engagement process, an important consultation process for the project. The campaign will continue over into the next Office's term. The VP External Affairs

⁴ Dagger, Jackson. "AMS announces transit subsidy for July and August". *The Ubyyssey*. July 22, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.ubyssey.ca/news/subsidize-my-transit-costs-please/>

⁵ Government of Canada: Prime Minister's Office. "New public transit investments to build strong communities, fight climate change, and create new jobs across Canada". February 10, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2021/02/10/new-public-transit-investments-build-strong-communities-fight-climate>

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has also produced some significant multimedia content to be used by future Vice-Presidents as this SkyTrain project foresees an increase in public awareness as the year(s) go by.

GOAL 2: ADVOCATE FOR AN ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, AND SUPPORTIVE EDUCATION

Values: Inclusive, Equitable, Collaborative

2.1 Federal/Provincial Financial Aid

Campaign Promise: Advocate for the elimination of interest rates on Canadian federal student loans similar to the elimination of interest rates on BC student loans.

Reported Goal(s) Progress: In understanding that the provincial government removed interest rates on the provincial portion of student loans, the Office has, throughout the past year, been pursuing the removal of interest rates on the federal portion of student loans. By the majority, this advocacy initiative was done in partnership with the Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities (UCRU). During UCRU's Federal Advocacy Week, in which the AMS took part, the Office advocated for eliminating federal student loan interest rates until the end of 2022 to ensure that students were well-supported throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The lobby week resulted in meetings with over 60 Members of Parliament (MPs) where the AMS advocated for the aforementioned item and increased investments into student and youth employment, funding for undergraduate research opportunities, and Indigenous student aid.

Following UCRU's Federal Advocacy Week, the federal government announced through the 2020 *Fall Economic Statement* the following accomplishments: the removal of interest rates until 2022, \$575.5 million into the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy, and \$447 million into the Canada Summer Jobs program ⁶. This announcement was followed up by the federal *Budget 2021* which invested additional (in addition to the *Fall Economic Statement*) figures of \$371.8 million into the Canada Summer Jobs program, \$239.8 million into the Student Work Placement Program, \$109.3 million into the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy and extended the removal of interest accrual until March 31, 2023. *Budget 2021* also invested \$203.5 million into the Loan Repayment Assistance program and \$3.1 billion into the Canada Student Grants program ⁷.

Equity-based grants was another project that the Office had undertaken through the Social Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Sustainability Program. The Office had commissioned research into the barriers that students with disabilities and international students face in pursuing a post-secondary education through PSYCH 421. The Office also commissioned research to look into the viability of equity-based grants as potential support mechanisms for racialized minorities in pursuing a post-secondary education. These reports allowed us to see

⁶ AMS of UBC. "Investments Into Students From The Canadian Government". November 30, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.ams.ubc.ca/news/investments-into-students-from-the-canadian-government/>

⁷ AMS of UBC. "AMS Applauds Federal Government For Investing In Students". April 19, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.ams.ubc.ca/news/ams-applauds-federal-government-for-investing-in-students/>

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that equity-based grants can play a strong role in supporting marginalized communities and will be followed-up by next year's Office.

The AMS' BC Budget 2021 submission made several recommendations including providing post-secondary institutions with the ability to run budget deficits in order to support students and student services throughout the pandemic. The submission also recommended a review of post-secondary institutional operating grants as they have a significant impact on various issues such as tuition rates, along with the quality of student services that are offered. The provincial government, in February of 2021, announced that post-secondary institutions would be allowed to run budget deficits⁸. Additionally, as a part of the Ministry of Advanced Education's mandate letter following the BC Snap Elections, the provincial government has committed to a funding review of post-secondary operating grants⁹.

2.2 Open Education Resources

Campaign Promise: Advocate for the funding of Open Education[al] Resources (OERs) by partnering with other institutions to push for funding from the provincial government towards OERs in order to make online learning resources more accessible.

Reported Goal(s) Progress: The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic made it very clear to the Office of the Vice-President of External Affairs that ensuring affordable and accessible learning materials for students was crucial. Affordability for students requires a holistic look at the high costs that they face during their degree. Tuition increases continue year after year; when other rising costs such as textbooks are taken into account, education is becoming more and more costlier. OERs are free, online course materials such as textbooks and assessment tools that lower barriers, and serve as a more equitable way for students to access educational material.

The submission made by the AMS to the BC Budget 2020 Consultation included a dedicated section specifically calling for increased investments made to BC Campus, the province's main developer of OERs. The recommendation called for an allocation of \$5 million in funding towards BC Campus which would allow for the increased adaptation of open textbooks to play a positive role in academic environments post-COVID-19. After consulting various stakeholders including BC Campus, the \$5 million figure was decided on, especially upon reflecting the significant impact that the \$12 million investment the BC government had made to OERs in the years prior. Following various advocacy meetings and conversations on the importance of OERs in the

⁸ Fletcher, Tom. "B.C. colleges, universities allowed to run COVID-19 deficits". *February 12, 2021*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vicnews.com/business/b-c-colleges-universities-allowed-to-run-covid-19-deficits/>

⁹ Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: Anne Kang*. November 26, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/premier-cabinet/mlas/minister-letter/kang_mandate_2020.pdf

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province, the BC government responded with various investments into BC Campus, totalling approximately \$675,000, put towards the development of these resources and courses.¹⁰

OERs are crucial to the success of students that cannot afford traditional textbooks, as well as students that live in remote areas, students who do not have access to the internet, and students that rely on other forms and methods of learning as opposed to traditional textbooks.

2.3 Sexual Violence Prevention

Campaign Promise: Fight for Minimum Standards for Bill 23 Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act to ensure proper care for survivors and continue to push for a parallel process for policy review for provincial sexual violence policies.

Reported Goal(s) Progress: This year, a key goal for the Office was advancing the work that had been previously done around amendments to the *Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act* which mandates post-secondary institutions to create their own dedicated sexual violence prevention policies. The Office completed a project that displayed the discrepancies that institutional sexual violence policies had as a result of the lack of minimum standards in the Act. The project will be used by following Offices to ensure that amendments to the Act are ensured and that sexual violence prevention policies are survivor-centric, trauma-informed, and acknowledging of the intersectionality of survivors of sexualized and gender-based violence. The completed project will be included in the transition of the new Office as a key piece to advocate on when lobbying for the establishment of minimum standards in the Act. Additionally, the Office also continuously met with student unions to discuss the importance of these amendments.

The Office also advocated on increased funding towards sexual violence prevention bodies and support networks. As a result of the Office's advocacy on this important issue, the provincial government committed towards increased funding to end gender-based and sexualized violence in British Columbia. This commitment was included in the Solicitor-General's mandate letter following the BC Snap Elections ¹¹. The Office will be pushing that this be included in Budget 2022 as a part of the Office's transition to the following Office.

GOAL 3: CREATING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR ALL STUDENTS

Values: Inclusive, Equitable, Strategic

3.1 International Student Support

¹⁰ Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training. "New supports for post-secondary students this fall" *July 15, 2020*. Retrieved from: https://archive.news.gov.bc.ca/releases/news_releases_2017-2021/2020AEST0038-001289.htm

¹¹ Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: Mike Farnworth*. November 26, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/premier-cabinet/mlas/minister-letter/farnworth_mandate_2020.pdf

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Campaign Promise: Advocate that the Provincial government extend the 2% cap on annual tuition raises be inclusive to international students; push the government to amend the qualification guidelines under the Canadian Experience Class Express Entry (CECEE) program to allow international students to count full-time and entrepreneurial experience as eligible work experience.

Reported Goal(s) Progress: International student advocacy has been at the forefront of the Office's goals due to the inequities that arose out of the COVID-19 pandemic. In understanding that the provincial and federal government's main priorities are to support residents and citizens of British Columbia and Canada respectively, we took the approach of initiating systemic change for not only international students, but students as a whole across Canada. A key piece of this advocacy was the Office's work around the proportional decrease in post-secondary institutional operating grants which impact international students the most. On average, international student tuition accounts for 25% of an institution's operating budget aside from the operating revenue they receive from the province¹². As a result, we advocated for the provincial government to increase operating grants and to at the least, commission a review of post-secondary operating grants citing the disproportionate impact decreasing operating grants have on international students. As previously mentioned, a review of post-secondary operating grants was a commitment by the Ministry of Advanced Education after the BC Snap Election¹³.

Additionally, the Office, through its commissioning of equity-based grants research, explored research into the barriers to completing a post-secondary education that international students face. This research will inform the following Office of the key areas that international students are struggling in and areas in which the Office can advocate for in a comprehensive manner.

Advocacy was also done on the Canadian Experience Class (Express Entry) program. Several submissions were made to the federal government on this matter and the issue has been raised with UCRU to mark it as an item to be advocated on in following years. As a result, ensuring the relationship with UCRU was solidified and cemented as much as possible through formalization will, in the future, provide international students with better support from the federal government.

3.2 Indigenous Student Support

Campaign Promise: Fight for funding and/or subsidies towards Indigenous language and Indigenous studies courses, including access to OERs; work with VP AUA to bring in funding to support programs that increase awareness and education amongst the UBC student population regarding Indigenous support and reconciliation; ensure the federal government contributes more funding towards [the] Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) geared towards supporting Indigenous students and advocating with them for support.

¹² British Columbia Federation of Students. Fund It, Fix It. 2019.

¹³ Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: Anne Kang*. November 26, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/premier-cabinet/mlas/minister-letter/kang_mandate_2020.pdf

Reported Goal(s) Progress: Ensuring that Indigenous students are well-supported and commitments to ensure meaningful reconciliation is continuous work that the Office has undertaken throughout the past year. A key goal that the Office had worked on this year in terms of advocacy was increased investments to the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) which acts as a financial aid mechanism for Indigenous students. This advocacy was worked on in coordination with UCRU. As a part of the 2021 Federal Advocacy Week, the AMS and UCRU advocated to over 60 MPs pushing for increased to the program as Indigenous communities were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the program was up for renewal of funding. As a result of the joint advocacy between the AMS and UCRU, the federal government announced, as a part of *Budget 2021* that over \$150 million would be invested in the program.

Provincially, the AMS included Indigenous Student Support recommendations such as expanding the tuition waiver program to all former Youth-in-Care. These recommendations, which were apart of the AMS-GSS 2021 Provincial Advocacy Week, were included in the Minister of Advanced Education's mandate letter after the BC Snap Election and are expected to be completed by the Ministry by the next provincial election¹⁴. The recommendations were worked on in coordination with the AMS Indigenous Committee. In addition to the aforementioned recommendations, the Office also made standalone recommendations to increase funding towards the Aboriginal Emergency Financial Assistance fund which provides emergency financial aid options to Indigenous students registered in post-secondary institutions across British Columbia.

3.3 Climate Action Advocacy

Campaign Promise: Ensure that the Provincial government is working with PSIs in regards to CleanBC; fight for students to be consulted with Labour Readiness Program (LRP) to ensure that graduates are prepared to work in the CleanBC market; push the Provincial government to meet CleanBC targets; advocate for stronger climate action by the Provincial and Federal government; effectively warrant the AMS advocates for all levels of government to fulfill its emission reduction targets; increase support for climate advocacy groups on campus through heightened funding to increase awareness and execution climate-action related projects.

Reported Goal(s) Progress: Advocating for stronger climate action was an important aspect of the Vice-President's campaign prior to taking office. Ensuring that the provincial government met its CleanBC targets while supporting PSIs commit to effectively ensuring that graduates are ready for a green economy was an important goal. The Office held various lobby meetings with

¹⁴ Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: Anne Kang*. November 26, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/premier-cabinet-mlas/minister-letter/kang_mandate_2020.pdf



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members of the federal and provincial governments, as well as UBC and student-groups to advocate for stronger climate action.

However, due to the surprise BC snap-election, the rise of COVID-19-related issues such as the U-Pass program, exclusion of students from the TRS, and concerns of international student wellbeing amidst the pandemic, we were forced to prioritize putting our efforts toward solving these imminent issues first. Nevertheless, the Office accomplished numerous goals that effectively and actively changed the lives of students on the ground as you have seen throughout this report. The Office continued to stay engaged in conversations on sustainability and climate action through various initiatives with stakeholders in the meantime, with a strong continuation plan under the incoming Vice-President of External Affairs.

END OF REPORT