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# Strategic Plan

**THE NEXT QUINQUENNIAL: 2023-2028**

ALMA MATER SOCIETY OF UBC VANCOUVER

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL  
APRIL 12, 2023**

# CONTENTS

- 2 Vision**
- 3 Mission**
- 4 Message from the President**
- 5 Direction**
- 9 Guiding Principles**
  - Student First
  - Integrity and Sincerity
  - Above and Beyond
- 12 Strategic Priorities**
  - Exceptional Programming
  - Delivering Results
  - Cultivating a Sense of Belonging
  - Operational Excellence
  - Collaborative Leadership
- 17 Implementation**
  - Accountability
  - Integration
  - University Plans and Frameworks
- 19 Acknowledgements**

# VISION



A transformative student experience  
for a better every-day.



# MISSION

To improve the quality of the academic, social, and personal lives of UBC students.

The Alma Mater Society will promote high-quality student learning and a fulfilling campus experience. It will advocate for what is in the best interest of its members to the University of British Columbia and the Government. The Society will provide student-focussed and accessible services, as well as diverse opportunities to become exceptional leaders and global citizens.

It will cultivate unity, goodwill, and a sense of belonging among its members. The Society will go above and beyond, putting students before all else.

The AMS will be among the best student societies in the world.



# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to the AMS Strategic Plan: The Next Quinquennial. To unite the Alma Mater Society (AMS) around one vision through a strategic plan has been a dream for years, with some discussions starting as early as 2002. Over the past 18 months, the AMS has engaged in consultation, meaningful conversations, analysis of trends, deliberation and discussions on the challenges we face as a student society—some that are periodic and others that endure the dynamic nature of a university campus.

This plan sets out our collective vision, mission, and strategic priorities for the coming years with rejuvenated energy. The AMS plays a unique role on campus, which includes providing essential services, but with utmost importance, means being the one entity on campus that always, at all costs, acts in the best interest of the student community. With a membership of 60,000 students at the time of the creation of this plan, it remains a challenge to achieve consensus and popularity on all decisions made. Student societies are exceptionally vulnerable to “short-termism.” This Strategic Plan aims to align ourselves to some unwavering goals and visions that lie at the core of our purpose on this campus, that all those with the best interests of the Society and students at heart, will find themselves bought into.

For those responsible for the implementation of this plan over the next five years, never forget who you are here to serve. Among our peers are those who have worked multiple jobs to support our operations, those whose parents make sacrifices to afford them a high-quality educational experience, and those who are counting on you to help make this large campus feel like home. We have the privilege of serving those students and one interaction with you can determine whether or not they will ever interact with the AMS again. Carry yourself humbly and with the mission to serve, giving students your all. That’s the spirit at the heart of this Strategic Plan and I am proud of the way our community has come together to commit to the direction and values so evident in this plan. I extend unalloyed gratitude to all those who contributed their perspectives, passion, and effort to its creation.



**Eshana Bhangu**  
President, 2022-2023

# DIRECTION

*The role of this strategic plan.*

In developing this plan, our archivist, Sheldon Goldfard, would offer a reminder to every reader that the AMS has faced similar issues veiled under different faces with unique contexts across our 108-year history—we have tested just about everything under the sun.

This Strategic Plan reflects on the persistent and enduring challenges on the rise, sets out our vision and purpose, and importantly, outlines the values we will operate on across five crucial strategic priorities to fulfill over the next five years.

This plan describes strong connections between our mission, values, and strategic priorities. The strategic priorities will assist in overcoming the key challenges facing the AMS, and the values and mission have been developed through the extensive contributions of our student community.

The direction of everything we will do is enthusiastically highlighted in this plan, guiding the AMS in coming closer to fulfilling its purpose over the next quinquennial.

## SOME CHALLENGES WE FACE

### **Staying relevant for our membership.**

Students are immersed in a campus environment saturated with opportunities to be engaged—social media, physical presence, social organizations, recreational activities, service providers, student clubs, undergraduate societies, and much more. The imperative question we must ask ourselves is: with the sheer amount of stimulus fighting for the attention of students and our community members, how do we ensure that we connect authentically and meaningfully? Our focus on the value we provide to our membership and at our core, the purpose of our existence at UBC is integral to our success as a student society. Profound and

consistent evaluation through self-awareness in everything we do will ensure our actions are in touch with the student body's needs and communicated appropriately in a way that never misses the mark. It is not important for our members to fall in love with the AMS or to even be aware of the AMS. That's far too vain an ambition for a student society fundamentally committed to service and representation. Critical to our purpose, however, is improving the lives and experiences of our members in some way or another, despite their level of knowledge and awareness.

**Advocacy strategy.** A challenge facing many other non-profit organizations and student societies around the world, is deciding on what the organization’s time, resources, and energy will be spent on—a challenge no different for our advocacy to UBC and all levels of government. The past half of a decade have seen several calls for us to advocate for a variety of issues, some of which contradict each other, some of which fall outside our mandate, and some of which are unfeasible yet unequivocally important to parts of our membership. The challenge we face is two-fold: (1) we must determine what to advocate for, and (2) we must ensure our membership feels heard and communicated with, notably when there are calls to action that we choose not to proceed with.

**Maintaining affordability of our businesses and services for our members.** During the development of this Strategic Plan, the AMS has been managing a significant financial deficit as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, staggering inflation, skyrocketing labor costs, increased costs related to supply chain issues, and growing competition for our businesses on campus. Unlike businesses at large, we cannot simply raise prices to the rates proportional to the costs we face as a matter of principle. Our primary mandate as a student society is to serve our membership. Maintaining affordability on the items in our control is a key factor in fulfilling that mandate. Organized and successful businesses, revenue generation, and fiscal responsibility has earned us the stature of

one of the best student societies in the country. And while we collect student fees from our membership, the aim is to keep these AMS-controlled fees as low as possible, thus our business operations are what we rely on in order to support our services and operations. A key challenge to overcome in the next 5 years as we recover from the financial deficit on our operating budget and as we strive to enhance services, events, and operations, will be to discover creativity within ourselves with respect to revenue generation and income streams apart from membership fees collection.

**A united campus where our membership feels like they belong.**

One of the biggest challenges with a membership of 60,000 students is creating a sense of identity, unity, and campus spirit that every member feels connected to. This is deeply tied to our mandate as a student union—to ensure that students, simply put, feel happy with their university experience. There is virtually no end to the list of research that proves greater academic performance and wellbeing is integrated with a sense of community and belonging. Thousands of students enter this university after having worked exceptionally hard to earn their place, yet feel like a number once they’re here. Many students link self-worth and value to academic performance and some of these students hit harsh realities when they find themselves among several high-achieving peers, resulting in mental health and wellbeing challenges. Many

students are unable to find a group to connect with in their first few months, going on to spend the next years of their degree feeling at times isolated in their struggles, without the support and community every student needs and deserves. In Canada, we rarely see the kind of stadiums and campus-wide activities with students adorning their school colors to cheer with spirit as we do with our counterparts south of the border. The lack of a united identity and community on campus has been a challenge for decades, made more difficult to endure by the pandemic, and remains a persistent one for the foreseeable future, unless strategies are employed with intention and deliberation.

**Stagnant operations.** In the 2022/23 academic year, we have made strides in bouncing back from the COVID-19 pandemic, restructuring the governance and management of the organization, and investing significant time and resources in infrastructure enhancements. Some may reminisce about the increasingly-distant period of time when two clubs would be simultaneously present at the same venue as a result of double-booking errors with our room bookings process. Our reimbursement process wait times are known for being infamously long. These are two of the most intimate interactions and key functions we provide for our subsidiary organizations, yet these are the two that have exhibited embarrassing levels of inefficiencies. In the development of this Strategic Plan, we have made significant investments into a new

enterprise resource planning (ERP) system transition that faced a rocky rollout, and then we've made additional investments toward overhauling the reimbursement system, financial processes, user manuals and training guides in hopes of fixing the persistent issues once and for all. Investments toward fixing the room bookings process were less so monetary and more so personnel-related—amounting to significant hours over the course of years to streamline workflows, ensure faster response times, outfitting mechanisms for advanced bookings, and more. The challenge we foresee for the AMS in the coming years is that we can fall prey to believing these systems do not need constant, consistent, and comprehensive evaluation and feedback to inform enhancements, which may result in operational stagnation with respect to serving our subsidiary organizations.

This Strategic Plan strives to describe strong connections across our three guiding principles and five strategic priorities, to not only overcome the aforementioned challenges in fulfilling our mission, but rather all potential challenges that can prevent us from fulfilling our mandate of a transformative student experience for a better every-day.







# GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

*Key values we operate on, to overcome the challenges aforementioned.*

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Student First
- Integrity and Sincerity
- Above and Beyond

## STRATEGIC PLAN THE NEXT QUINQUENNIAL

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Exceptional Programming
- Delivering Results
- Cultivating a Sense of Belonging
- Operational Excellence
- Collaborative Leadership

### VALUE 1: STUDENT FIRST

When students thrive, everyone wins. Our university is smarter; the learning is deeper, the discoveries are richer. When student needs are met, tomorrow’s leaders can focus on what they do best: creating a better future for everyone.

The AMS will serve the full picture of student life, making our campus environment safer, healthier, affordable and accessible. More fun, more social and more fulfilling. We will continue to build a sense of community and help others find their people—making a big university feel a little bit smaller: importantly, a place where we all belong. We do, and will

continue to do more than most will ever know, but that’s how it should be. Where some see a campus, we see human beings with diverse backgrounds and different priorities. The more of us who engage, the louder our voice and the greater our impact will be. The AMS is a society led by students, working for students, and for 108 years and counting, it’s this operating model that will continue to demonstrate the extraordinary value of a student society at the University of British Columbia.

We’re student-led, student-focused and always student-first.

### VALUE 2: INTEGRITY AND SINCERITY

Because a relationship of trust with our general membership is paramount. As the largest student society in Canada, the AMS

has the responsibility to be a leader among student societies, ensuring integrity and sincerity across all staff,

volunteers, and senior leadership. Integrity is a commitment to operating ethically and in good faith for the best interests of the student body, even when no one is watching. Sincerity is a commitment to being good-hearted and transparent across all facets of the organization, between individual staff members, different departments, and with the community at large.

We acknowledge that a campus of 60,000 bright minds will host differing views from time to time. We will be intent on fostering free and open debate, as well as respect for conflicting perspectives. Considering the input of individuals and key stakeholder

groups will guide the decision-making of all major projects—championing inclusivity and accessibility in all consultation processes. With our five offices and many supporting staff members, we will be well-equipped to be actively immersed in the student community, responsibly delivering engagement opportunities, identifying participants and ensuring they have the opportunity to provide informed input. We will put the needs of the student body above personal gain, ensuring continuity across administrations and prioritizing long-term growth over short-term talking points.

### **VALUE 3: ABOVE AND BEYOND**

The student society could not function without the bright people that compose each office, many of whom serve students in different capacities, and all of whom bring to the table curiosity, forward-thinking and innovation. We will never steer away from intensifying our efforts for an improved student experience, and we must go beyond settling for comfort and embracing habits, correcting the ones that don't work and always working to improve the ones that do.

We take ownership of everything we work on, and especially the mistakes. There will be a culture of self-evaluation and improvement, no matter how little, to advance a momentum of growth that

cannot decelerate. Each marginal action has a direct impact on individual students, therefore there is no other option but to work toward a landscape where the AMS is servant, not master—the stakes are too high. Every staff member across every office will carry themselves by championing a service-oriented mindset. They will make a serious and continuously active effort to understand the privilege and responsibility that comes with being a decision-maker and representative in the AMS, at a profound level.

We will never settle for less, and we must always go above and beyond.







# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

*To rise above and beyond the challenges aforementioned.*

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Exceptional Programming
- Delivering Results
- Cultivating a Sense of Belonging
- Operational Excellence
- Collaborative Leadership

**ANNUAL GOAL-SETTING**  
EXECUTIVES + COMMITTEES  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

## IMPLEMENTATION

- Executive and Staff
- Standing Committees
- Subsidiaries
- Business Operations

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: EXCEPTIONAL PROGRAMMING

Bringing like-minded people together is a core ingredient of a healthy and resilient campus community. We recognize our inherent purpose to unite the students studying at UBC. From Welcome Back BBQ to Block Party and everything in between, from club showcase events to lighthearted workshop events, embracing a culture of exceeding expectations will require a constant reinforcement of a student-first mindset, innovation, and a standard of going above and beyond.

It's in the programming delivered where many students find their community and create memories that last a lifetime. Programming should therefore seek to offer something for everyone. To ensure that the barrier for participation is as low as possible, leaving any participant looking forward to more impactful and meaningful experiences. The AMS is uniquely placed to play a leading role in delivering this caliber of programming. As we strive to excel in this endeavor, we will also support our

subsidiary organizations, ensuring a collective trajectory of growth across the university landscape.

As the world recovers from the dull hiatus of the COVID-19 global pandemic, we will think forward as a steward of injecting desperately-needed energy into the student community—we will use this ambition to further propel the programming delivered from a trajectory of recovery toward an aggressive trajectory of growth. Equally, we will balance the financial realities and pressures of holding exceptional events and elevating programming to the caliber the student community deserves, allowing for a fiscally responsible approach toward a positive impact on student life.

These priorities position the AMS well to embrace the extraordinary opportunities of curating exceptionally memorable experiences for everyone.

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: DELIVERING RESULTS**

The AMS has worked for years to build a credible reputation on the campus we operate on. Relative to our contemporaries across the country, we play a strong role in shaping the decisions of the University, including having a seat at nearly all the tables making decisions that impact our membership. We will treat our relationship with the University with respect and we will operate in good faith, appropriately following due processes with exceptional professionalism and carrying conviction to put forth our calls to action prior to escalation.

We envision that for the AMS, advocacy does not mean trying—it means being successful in those calls to action, no matter how ambitious they are. We will strive to be meaningful, pragmatic, and effective in our advocacy, taking a data-driven approach to put forth requests to the University. When our membership calls on us to advocate for an issue close to their hearts, we will work with groups and do our necessary due diligence to assess the feasibility and develop strategies. If some matters are

entirely unfeasible in nature, we will take every step to communicate with our membership and we will ensure that students feel heard, even if their issues cannot be delivered on.

Being data-driven, pragmatic, and mandate-focussed to ensure our advocacy is impacting the students on the UBC Vancouver campus in our approach can be the key differentiator between a student society that is respected and listened to by the University and all levels of government, and one that is consulted with for performative reasons.

We will always prioritize issues that are at the heart of our members' needs and we will strive to be data-driven, tangible, mandate-focussed and concrete in our advocacy campaigns and initiatives. The AMS will stand out as a student society that delivers successful advocacy for its members.

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: CULTIVATING A SENSE OF BELONGING**

Cultivating a sense of belonging for a student body of 60,000 is no easy feat, but it is possible with intentional efforts and strategies. It's essential to consider that students generally find their community in smaller groups, whether it is in their classes, clubs, or undergraduate societies.

We are fortunate to have the high-caliber subsidiary organizations that put their heart and soul into making this campus a more fun and welcoming space for all students. We will, therefore, put our complete heart and soul into supporting our subsidiary organizations to fulfill

their needs as they see fit, promoting and investing in campus collaboration, school spirit, and being intentional in encouraging inclusive participation in events. The core purpose for every student at UBC is an academic mission of their own, and we are committed to serving as one of the go-to supports and resources to enhance the academic experience of every member. We will work to provide mental health and wellbeing support, whether through our own plans or through robust advocacy—creating a campus culture that promotes self-care, stress management, and healthy coping strategies. Through operational excellence, we will be intentional to create welcoming spaces

that enrich the community, catering to different needs and preferences of our membership. We are committed to cultivating a sense of belonging for our members through an integrated approach with our subsidiaries, academic support, and creating an inclusive campus culture.

When students feel supported academically, engaged in campus life, welcomed by intentional spaces, they will feel connected to the higher education landscape, feel a sense of ownership, and develop a sense of belonging.

#### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE**

The Nest is located at the heart of student life to eat, shop, socialize, and study. It is foundational to much of the growth in membership engagement and subsidiary relationships of the Society since the building's inauguration in 2015. Our partners include the 360+ student clubs and 20+ constituencies that help to provide a sense of belonging for our general membership of 60,000 and growing. And they include community groups on campus, faculty and staff across the university, as well as commercial clients across the province and beyond. We are keen on working with key stakeholders to ensure the interactions our subsidiaries and community partners have with the Nest, and the Society's other facilities and systems promote productivity and

ease-of-mind. We envision a culture of consistent self-evaluation and mechanisms in place to ensure a burdenless experience. Through innovative planning and acting with intention, we will carefully maintain our infrastructure, while also endeavoring to make improvements and additions, so every project we embark on seeks to reach its highest potential.

Data-driven decision making and public engagement are vitally important. For this reason, we will work with students and leverage key stakeholder relationships to advance knowledge during the planning process and to ensure seamless integration during the rollout stages. We should only strive to take on capital

projects that matter to our membership and carefully consider a project's lifespan, taking into account often overlooked stages such as upkeep and after-lifespan requirements. To support a service-oriented mindset, we will transform the standard we hold ourselves to when it comes to improving internal AMS processes. To us that means delivering an efficient financial management system, timely responses with online communications, a stress-free venue booking process, a culture of in-person engagement complemented by formal data collection, and ensuring student concerns are always addressed in a timely manner.

The Society's operations play a profound role in shaping the UBC student experience. It is our responsibility to make the most out of our resources. We are committed to being a leader in proactive decision-making and consistently re-evaluating our facilities and the day-to-day systems we rely on, to ensure we're providing a space that is convenient, impactful and useful where everyone can call the Nest their second home.

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5: COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP**

The AMS is one of the most unique organizations with the vast number of stakeholders and the sheer opportunities for collaboration, both within the AMS umbrella and external to our community. One of the core strategies to accomplish our mission to enhance the lives of UBC students will be to take a collaborative approach for leadership. Everyone within the organization will work to prioritize a collective pride and sense of achievement for the AMS, not for any one individual, executive, or staff. We will operate in good faith and trust that those we work with inside the organization have the best

interests of the AMS in mind and with our partnerships within campus and beyond, we will always strive to achieve our goal to serve the UBC student body. Through collaborative leadership, we will ensure that all departments within the organization, from the business units, to our student services, to the executive portfolios, to the standing committees of Council—everyone, is participating in annual strategic goal setting processes and working towards cohesive action as a collective. We will adopt a culture of operating as one team, rather than a fragment of teams within a team.







# IMPLEMENTATION

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Imperative to the success of this Strategic Plan's implementation, every year, the President and the four Vice-Presidents will report on their progress of executing the priorities and direction established in this plan, extensively informed by the evaluation of years of trends, months of data, and almost one year of careful deliberation and planning. The role of the executive and their frequent reporting will be important, for our shared understanding of progress and accomplishments, for accountability to our Board of Directors (AMS Council), and to ensure we are *constantly* pushing ourselves to be better. The Executive of the Society will hold themselves to the highest standard,

demonstrate integrity, and will create their executive goals and report on progress of their goals in alignment with this Strategic Plan. The Executive Performance and Accountability Committee will assess the executive's success in implementing the Strategic Plan within their goals.

The Managing Director of the Society shall conduct annual strategic planning and goal setting for the units reporting directly to them, in alignment with the principles and direction laid out in this plan to fulfill the purpose, vision, and mission of the AMS.

## INTEGRATION

AMS Strategic Plan: The Next Quinquennial both seeks to connect existing foundational plans unfolding in today's landscape, and anticipates the establishment of future internal institutional plans and frameworks to guide the delivery of other strategic target areas of growth deemed worthy by the AMS. We recognize that the current Equity Action Plan (2023) and Sustainable Action Plan (2020) align appropriately under the vision of this Strategic Plan.

This document articulates the high-level expectation that all individuals with the privilege of representing the AMS should hold themselves to. It seems to embed

continuity, cohesion, and tackle the fragmentation that comes with annual turnover. Successful implementation will require a profound subscription to the ideals outlined in this document by every staff member, and crucially at the executive level.

Elected representatives at Council and the community at large should have the jurisdiction to hold all decision-makers accountable to this Strategic Plan. At the same time, all staff members should have access to the resources and necessary support needed to achieve the strategic priorities set forth in this document.

## UNIVERSITY PLANS AND FRAMEWORKS

We operate within a Top 40 University in the world and cannot, at any point, operate inside an echo chamber composed of just ourselves. We envision that we will work to learn from the campus we operate on and the land we learn on.

This Strategic Plan will guide the AMS, however, the AMS does not need to replicate the work and labor that has gone toward a significant level of meaningful institutional plans and frameworks created by UBC that align with our values. Apart from working alongside our own Sustainable Action Plan and the Equity Action Plan, we will assess areas where we can implement the following plans by the University on an annual basis.

Anti-Racism & Inclusive Excellence Report  
Inclusion Action Plan  
Indigenous Strategic Plan  
Student Affordability Plan  
Climate Action Plan 2030

The AMS Strategic Plan will act as the ultimate vision within the AMS for the Executive and Senior Management to align the organization over the next quinquennial. Together, under a collective effort, this document outlines a five-year trajectory that will place the AMS among the best student societies in the world.

“Open channels of communication will create a close connection with students.”

**AMS MEMBER, THIRD YEAR**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Students at UBC are often consumed by their personal lives, working part-time jobs, learning in the classroom, trying to navigate such a large university, and building connections that will hopefully last a lifetime. They should never have to worry about what their student society is up to, because we will always have their back.

The AMS owes unalloyed gratitude to all the members of the community who devoted their time, effort, and expertise to the creation of this Plan.

This endeavor would not have come to fruition without the following people.

## **Ben Du**

Vice-President, Administration (2022-2023)  
Primary Author

## **Eshana Bhangu**

President (2022-2023)  
Primary Author

## **Cole Evans**

Former AMS President (2020-2021, 2021-2022) for leading the consultation and early stages of drafting the AMS Strategic Plan.

## **Eric Lowe, Christine Halonen, Vishwa Mohan, Celia Chung, Kathleen Simpson**

Senior Management

## **Sheldon Goldfarb**

Archivist and Clerk of Council

*And most importantly, our membership, without whom we would have no purpose.*























*"Working together, under a collective effort, this document outlines a five-year trajectory that will place the AMS among the best student societies in the world."*