



**GRADUATE
STUDENT SOCIETY**
UBC VANCOUVER

Submission to the UBC Board of Governors Regarding Student Consultation

Dear UBC Board of Governors,

This letter is being written on behalf of the Alma Mater Society (“AMS”) and the Graduate Student Society (“GSS”) in regards to continued concerns that the Administration is making significant decisions that impact students without meaningfully consulting elected student leadership. This is the second letter that our organizations have sent to the Board regarding this issue within a 9 month period.

Student consultation is a critical component of the decision-making process at the highest levels of the university, and ensures that students can thrive in an inclusive, diverse and safe environment. The AMS and the GSS acknowledge that efforts and positive change has been made in consultation processes over the last year, for example, the development of a tuition consultation schedule for new programs that is well coordinated with both Societies and establishes an effective framework for meaningful consultation.

The AMS and the GSS acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented number of new challenges. We are pleased by how actively the VP Students Office has engaged with our organizations and not only sought, but also clearly listened to the student perspective on a diverse number of issues, such as student services financial aid. The GSS also acknowledges the efforts made by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Provost’s Office in issues that affect this group of students, such as continuity of research funding, scholarships and the role of graduate students in the teaching activities of the university. Student consultation is especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, where every single change from short-term to strategic has massive implications for the entire UBC student population, and can affect students' academic progress and wellbeing for many years to come.

Despite the positive and meaningful instances of consultation listed above, and many others, after reviewing submissions from the most recent June 2020 Committee cycle, it is clear to us that an alarming amount of opportunities for student-consultation are being rushed, or even neglected. The most salient example of this is the absence of formal consultation with our organizations on the 5-Year Capital Plan. This plan lays out key changes to the UBC Vancouver campus and the proposals in it have the potential to fundamentally alter the experience for the students who attend it and. This is a plan that is primed for extensive consultation, which did not end up taking place. Another example of rushed consultation relates



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to the proposal of Online Course Certificate Offerings, where it was noted that “no concerns with the proposal were raised”. While the GSS declined to provide feedback based on jurisdictional limitation, the AMS did in fact raise concerns and ask for additional clarifications. For both of these items, we did not receive a formal proposal or timeline to examine details and be able to provide useful feedback to the Administration, and this Board, to guide their decision making and guarantee that the student voice is present in those decisions.

To remedy this situation, our organizations are highlighting the following **three critical areas** where the Administration can improve upon its poor student-consultation habits:

- 1. More Formalized Consultation.** Recently, our organizations have noticed that the Administration has developed a pattern of considering initial meetings to introduce materials or projects as sufficient consultation. The AMS and the GSS have specialized staff that is dedicated to analyzing new proposals and developing meaningful feedback based on research and resources that reflect the diversity of student views and needs on issues. Without receiving a formal proposal that can be distributed to our teams, our societies are not able to fully and thoroughly engage and examine proposals, do any necessary additional background research, and provide meaningful feedback. ***We ask that the Administration develops a systematic process to engage with student societies and that whenever student consultation is needed, that there is an explicit ask for consultative feedback with formalized proposals.***
- 2. Active Engagement.** It is critical that the Administration actively engage with the AMS and the GSS instead of only reacting to concerns when they are raised by our organizations. Patterns of reduced active engagements and major changes when newly elected leadership takes office can lead to ***increased scepticism that the university actually values the consistent input of elected student leadership.***
- 3. Information Sharing.** The AMS and the GSS are valuable assets to the Administration as we are able to provide meaningful insight into student perspectives on all topics with elected authority. However, it is ***difficult for our organizations to contribute meaningfully when the university fails to inform us of major developments or decisions prior to finalization or their public release.*** This has included decisions on Fall 2020 housing, faculty decisions on student learning experiences, student fees, and more. Not only will more information sharing allow for greater student input, but



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will also create more opportunities for positive additions to plans that will reflect well on the Administration.

The AMS and the GSS would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Vice-President, Students, and the President and Vice-Chancellor to more actively involve our organizations in discussions since our November 2019 letter to the Board. However, it should be made clear that it is not the sole responsibility of the VPS to engage with our organizations, but rather that of the entire Administration. If the Administration is truly committed to student-consultation, there must be an Administration-wide commitment to engaging with the AMS and the GSS that is prioritized at the Executive level. We hope the Board of Governors takes this opportunity to address these concerns and seek meaningful improvement from the Administration moving forward.

The AMS and the GSS are here for the same reason as the university, and that is to create a world-class postsecondary experience for UBC students. For all of our organizations to be able to properly execute that purpose, student consultation must be at the forefront of our decision-making.

Thank you to the Board of Governors for your consideration of this submission and your continued dedication to supporting UBC students.

Kind Regards,

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