

Commerce Undergraduate Society

Community Report

January 5th, 2018



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society

Introduction

The Commerce Undergraduate Society has a mission to “...cultivate the personal, professional, and academic success” of UBC Sauder BComs. But what does that actually mean to people? And more importantly, how can the CUS be doing a better job in fulfilling this mission?

In October, we asked UBC BComs how their undergraduate society was doing. We opened a survey, hosted coffee chats, and compiled data from our own internal observations. Combined with additional feedback that’s been collected through letters and emails, we hope now to start a discussion about the biggest issues facing the CUS. More importantly, we hope to begin a dialogue on how we, as a community, move forward.

With 49 survey responses and 7 coffee chats completed through the Community Pulse (raw responses attached), we can’t say that the feedback we gathered is necessarily representative of the entire BCom student body. This Community Report, therefore, shouldn’t be treated as an end-all statement of facts. When combined with the other sources of feedback mentioned above, we can, however, begin to identify some of the major pain-points that are affecting the CUS community.

TL; DR: Treat this report as an introduction, not a conclusion.

Purpose of this Report

The reasoning behind this report is to recognize that while the CUS needs to be a trusted, well-organized stakeholder in the UBC Sauder community, we know that we’re not meeting expectations in some areas. By looking at community feedback, developing key areas of focus for improvement, and implementing clear and accountable actions, the CUS hopes to start building greater trust with the UBC Sauder community – and most importantly – the students that we serve.

We also believe that this will be just the beginning of greater participation by the student body in the CUS’s operations. At the end of this Report, we’ll outline some of the ways that you can be involved in shaping the CUS in the future.

Key Themes

Based on the feedback we’ve received and the problems we’ve identified internally, the CUS will be considering changes along four broad themes. In each of these themes, we’ve developed key actions to address the feedback raised.

- (A) Clarity and communication
- (B) Accountability and representation
- (C) Frameworks for funding
- (D) A more focused society

Turning this Report into Action

While documenting and publishing feedback is great, the CUS understands that most students want to see a more proactive approach to dealing with concerns. This Report will be introducing an Action Plan that identifies key activities needed to address the feedback.

Some of these activities have been under development since September, while others will be recommendations for next year. To make things easier to understand, we've placed Actions into three categories:

Complete by Feb. 1st

These are Actions that are in development. Many of these depend on changes to the CUS Constitution, which will be voted on by the student body on January 24th.

Complete by April 1st

These Actions have been scoped and assigned owners, but will be in continuous development until the official CUS transition on April 1st.

2018/19 Recommendation

These Actions are larger projects that require dedicated teams to tackle. While they'll be investigated by the current CUS administration, these Actions will be left up to the discretion of next year's team.

These categories represent an implementation plan that will see changes to the CUS Constitution, Code of Procedure, and turnover process to reflect these Actions. Specifically:

CUS Constitutional Referendum

The CUS Constitution is the governing policy for all CUS-related services and activities. Based on the Actions in this report, the CUS will be proposing a new Constitution via a referendum during the CUS General Election on January 24th. A link to view and comment on the proposed Constitution is available at the end of this Report.

CUS Code of Procedure Amendment

The Code of Procedure details the processes that allow the CUS to execute the Constitution. Following a successful Constitutional Referendum, the CUS Board of Directors will implement a new Code of Procedure to ensure changes are enacted. More information about Code of Procedure amendments will be available following the results of the Constitutional Referendum.

Recommendations for the 2018/19 Team

Some of the recommendations in this report simply can't be accomplished this year. Instead, these recommendations will be forwarded to the incoming team, with more details about their potential implementation. Recommendations to next year's team will be published to the CUS Membership during transition in March.

Theme A

Clarity and communication

This theme encompasses one of the most talked about terms in student government: transparency. But it also captures a bigger and important idea: transparency means nothing if it isn't accompanied by clear and understandable language.

The biggest piece of feedback in our survey was on being transparent about funding. While we'll tackle that subject specifically in Theme C, ensuring that all CUS news and information is communicated with clarity in mind is a high priority.

CUS information can be categorized in two broad areas: internal and external. While both need work, internal information (like policies and procedures) is largely overseen by the Policy Committee and HR Commission. External information (hiring announcements, meeting schedules, etc.) is overseen by CUS Marketing. Both categories also fall under the Ombudsperson, who ensures the CUS operates transparently. While ownership over these areas is clear, the processes for them leaves more to be desired. Most CUS procedures around communicating information were developed years ago, and need updating. Clarity needs to be a key objective in our communication strategy. The Planned Actions for this theme, therefore, focus on revamping all aspects of CUS communication to focus on making it easy to share information in a clear and concise way:

Planned Action

Complete by Feb. 1st | Policy Committee

1. Clarify CUS policies by rewriting procedures to be concise and coherent

The regulations and rules contained in CUS Policy keep the organization running smoothly. The current CUS Constitution and Code, however, need to be refined to be more digestible. Rewriting our policies to be in concise, plain language will improve overall understanding.

Complete by April 1st | Ombudsperson

2. Create a clear process for making CUS information public in a timely manner

The CUS creates and handles a lot of information, much of which would be best made public for communication and accountability purposes. Developing and supporting a process that ensures CUS data is made public would be hugely beneficial.

Complete by April 1st | Marketing

3. Develop communication and design standards to promote consistency and clarity

The CUS hasn't developed comprehensive communication and design frameworks since 2011. These tools would help with presenting information in a clear and understandable format, and ease the CUS's ability to share information faster.

2018/19 Recommendation | Marketing & IT

4. Improve public CUS communication by redesigning cus.ca

cus.ca is meant to be a hub for all CUS-related information. Our policies point to it as a single source of truth, yet it hasn't been properly supported in years. While a big undertaking, next year's team should prioritize making sure cus.ca serves its purpose.

Theme B

Accountability and representation

Another historically important theme in student governance is accountability. How does the student body ensure that the CUS makes fair and equitable decisions? This can be approached in two directions: connecting elected CUS members (the Board of Directors) to their constituency and creating clear penalties for members who are uncommitted to their duties and break CUS policy.

Connecting elected CUS members to their constituency helps promote representation: the more students talk with their CUS representatives, the more accurately CUS can meet the student body's needs.

Creating published penalties for both breaking policy and missing commitments empowers the student body to hold their representatives accountable. Currently, policy infractions are only discussed internally, and the only way to remove an elected CUS member is by school-wide vote. When issues are only discussed internally, the student body's trust in the CUS erodes. When the only penalty for not performing your duties can only come from a referendum – which historically has not been an effective penalty due to logistical constraints – there is no real practical penalty.

Theme B's Planned Actions focuses on these areas by bolstering four projects already in the works: two focused on representation (1 and 4) and two focused on penalties (2 and 3):

Planned Action

Complete by Feb. 1st | Policy Committee

- 1. Promote visibility into the Board of Directors by standardizing Office Hours**
Office Hours were an experiment started in Term 1 of this year. Board members who were voted in by the student body take time to connect with their peers and address CUS concerns. These Office Hours will be visibly promoted and added as official duties in the Constitution.
- 2. Develop a robust process for communicating policy infractions**
With CUS policy being such an important part of the organization, it's important to know when and why we break our policies. The Ombudsperson should be empowered to publish data surrounding how and why we break our rules, with steps on how we can remedy the situation.
- 3. Create a stronger accountability system for elected CUS positions**
Elected positions in the CUS, such as Board members, should be held to a high-degree of confidence. Stricter descriptions on what elected positions do within the CUS, coupled with repercussions for those who fail to perform their duties, will create a more accountable CUS.
- 4. Provide dedicated events and continuous opportunities for feedback**
The CUS currently has no distinct process for collecting feedback from students. The CUS should always keep an online form open for general feedback and host a dedicated event (Community Pulse + Annual General Meeting) to receive feedback.

Frameworks for funding

Funding. Fees. Budget. With the CUS asking for so much from students (\$256 a year) these three words carry an emotional weight. While Theme D will talk more explicitly about fees, this theme is all about increasing the responsiveness and transparency across all CUS monetary decisions.

A lot of the feedback we got was about the budgeting process being unfair and confusing. In general, we also get a lot of feedback about funding decisions (such as SPF or Clubs Affiliation) being arbitrary and inconsistent. For the most part, this feedback is warranted. Many CUS decisions are a simple vote: CUS members consider an argument, have a discussion, vote, and move on. For decisions that can make or break a conference or club, we recognize that this is not enough.

We've actually faced this criticism before in a different area: hiring. In response, the CUS developed a comprehensive set of decision rubrics and policies that ensure hiring decisions are fair and equitable. Now it's time that same level of attention is brought to funding decisions.

The main funding processes (budgeting for services, SPF for external projects, and Clubs Affiliation for AMS clubs) need to have published decision rubrics. Additionally, SPF needs to be reserved for non-reoccurring projects only. Although a large undertaking, the CUS has already begun to make the necessary changes:

Planned Action

Complete by Feb. 1st | Policy Committee

1. Rewrite the CUS Budget allocation process to be more clear and effective

The CUS Budgeting process is one of the most important activities for the year – updating the current budgeting process to include communication guidelines and a feedback cycle is key to making the process more effective.

Complete by Feb. 1st | SPF Exploration Committee

2. Update the Special Projects Fund to use a consistent decision rubric and process

Now that the CUS SPF process has been combined with the UGO BCom Funding application, the CUS needs to create a clear and consistent decision rubric and process for evaluating SPF requests.

Complete by April 1st | Conference Affiliation Exploration Committee

3. Create a Conference Affiliation Program to better support student conferences

While student groups historically use SPF funding to organize conferences, the opportunity exists to provide more consistent and useful support to external conferences by creating an affiliation program similar to our Clubs Affiliation system.

Complete by April 1st | Policy Committee

4. Publish processes and decision rubrics for all financial decisions

While the previous recommendations provide an avenue for better decision-making, it is equally important to communicate the requirements and rubrics the CUS uses to make funding decisions. All new and existing funding processes should be published.

Theme D

A more focused society

The rest of the feedback the CUS received was focused on how the CUS works on a fundamental level: how fees are structured, the independence of option-specific clubs, and general comments on certain services getting more of the budget than others. Some of this feedback is due to a lack of understanding of CUS operations (which touches on making sure information is published in a clear and understandable way). Some of this feedback, however, is very much worth exploring.

The problem is that the CUS's structure is currently too operationally focused to envision major changes to how it works as a society. Part of this is due to the size of our operations. Our budget, supported by heavy student fees, dwarfs other faculties. This massive fund allows us to provide many services (26 of them) and support AMS clubs (12 to be exact). But it also means spending a lot of time on operational management. In the last few years, the CUS has steered too far away from any sort of strategic vision.

The CUS needs to re-focus on how it wants to participate in the broader UBC Sauder community. Yes, the student fee should be reconsidered. But first, we, as UBC Sauder students, need to have a broader discussion about what we value. For student fees to be cut, services need to be cut. For services to be cut, the CUS needs to say no to some great projects by passionate students that may not align with our values. This process will take years, but it's important that we start it now. The following Planned Actions focus on starting that dialogue:

Planned Action

Complete by April 1st | Board of Directors

- 1. Improve the CUS transition by better organizing turnover and information sharing**
Due to our annual election and hiring cycle, transition is a key activity for the CUS. Creating distinct processes for the overall transition of the CUS administration and preparing clear recommendations will solidify the current turnover process.

Complete by April 1st | Policy Committee

- 2. Improve team transition by electing a Chairperson of the Board before turnover**
While the CUS President is the overall leader of the organization, we recognize that the Board Chairperson plays a key role in supporting and organizing the Board of Directors. Selecting this position before transition would help to prepare this individual for their leadership role.

2018/19 Recommendation | Board of Directors

- 3. Review and audit current services to determine future budgeting**
The CUS should review how services are performing in relation to student experiences. Developing a process to facilitate a yearly review of services would allow the CUS to focus its limited resources on the services that see the most impact.

2018/19 Recommendation | Board of Directors

- 4. Consider the CUS's strategic vision and map out strategic plan**
The CUS is an extremely operationally-focused organization. The Board of Directors should develop a strategic vision that allows the CUS to plan for the future and achieve bigger goals.

Get involved

Just because we already gathered feedback during the Community Pulse doesn't mean public participation in this process is over. The following opportunities are available to any UBC Sauder BCom student:

A great way to get involved immediately is to read the Community Pulse feedback or review the proposed Constitution. Before reviewing the raw survey data, please note that this survey was open to the public via an online form. We have no way of verifying that the respondents were BCom students, or if one person entered multiple responses. Survey responses were considered in a holistic manner and combined with other tangible feedback (coffee chats, emails). There was a survey prize draw that used emails to determine winners, however that identifying information has been stripped.

View CUS Survey responses here: <http://bit.ly/CUSSurvey17Responses>.

Read the proposed Constitution here: <http://cus.ca/cus-constitution-jan18>.

Make your voice heard

1. Participate in the Annual General Meeting

If you have any thoughts or questions about this report, the CUS encourages you to attend the CUS Annual General Meeting, occurring on **January 10th, 2018 at 6:30pm in Birmingham**. This Q&A-style event will provide the best opportunity for us to answer your questions and hear you out. **More Info:** <https://www.facebook.com/events/179530799461041/>.

2. Attend the January Board of Directors Meeting

The Board of Directors will be reviewing the Community Report and officially calling for the Constitutional Referendum during their January Board meeting. The meeting will take place on **January 11th, 2018 at 6:00pm in Henry Angus (Classroom TBA)**. It will also be live-streamed via the CUS Youtube channel. **More Info:** <http://bit.ly/CUSJanBoardMeeting>.

3. Fill out the Anonymous Feedback Form

Want to stay anonymous? Complete this Google Form **by January 10th** to provide feedback on the Community Report or proposed Constitution: <http://bit.ly/CUSCommunityFeedback>.

4. Vote in the CUS Elections and Referendum

From January 24th and 26th, the CUS General Election will allow UBC Sauder BComs to choose their next Board of Directors. The CUS will also be holding a referendum to amend the CUS Constitution to address the Action Plan contained in this report.

5. Give Continuous Feedback

If you would like to provide feedback on CUS operations outside of this report or referendum, the Board of Directors (including the Ombudsperson) hold weekly Office Hours. For more information, please visit <http://cus.ca/student-services/ombudsperson/>. You may also email the Ombudsperson at any time: ombudsperson@cus.ca.