Errors in Finance Ministry memo re: B.C. student societies

Oct. 6, 2025

Dear Minister of Finance.

There are major errors in a 2025 briefing note to the Finance Minister by officials. (File: 292-30/FIN-2025-51322. "Issue: Concerns with the Governance and Management of Student Societies". This was found by Stanley Tromp via FOI, and will soon be a public record posted by Oct. 1 on the BC open government website.)

A government has the freedom to make policy, but can we all agree upon one thing: it needs to be based upon the correct facts? Here are several mistakes:

[1] " · Student societies are democratically run, and the board is accountable to the society's membership."

The exact contrary is true. In the files posted at https://canadafoi.ca/studentfoi/ one can read page after page of urgent student pleadings, for many decades, for more KSA and LSU democratic process and accountability in these bullying societies that are run more like secret private clubs, for profit. Just a few examples:

= Three LSU elections were voided due to "irregularities" (in 1995, in 2005, and 2015). See *LSU News File*

= The LSU does not state anywhere in its bylaws why it may move a meeting in-camera, in contrary to some other student unions. LSU members are barred from sitting in on council meetings without submitting an online application, which then must be approved by the council.

= "The Voice regularly receives anonymous emails and envelopes under the door over the years from students, often too afraid to speak on the record for fear of reprisal," *Voice* editor Jamie Mah told the Langara Board in 2024. "Student council members tell us they are prohibited from speaking to the Voice. Some say they were forced to sign NDAs. Others allege that LSU staff have threatened to have their student visas revoked if they don't fall in line."

Imagine it: *student visas revoked,* for foreign students struggling with English and unaware of their legal rights, in a new age of 80% cuts in foreign student admissions in some B.C. colleges. (See "Ruling by Fear" in the Backgrounder file) Now, to enforce compliance with its rigged elections, the LSU has hired its own private security firm, separate from College security. Indeed, why not extend high school anti bullying policies to college student societies?

= These societies are continually locked in grim warfare with student media, who seek answers about spending. LSU staffers have assaulted Voice reporters and mass-destroyed newspaper copies. In 2004 a new LSU policy compelled LSU executives who publicly criticized staff to resign if they did; it stated all media questions must be sent in writing, and student journalists who did not abide with the policy "shall be subject to discipline."

= In fall 2024, the KSA's allies tried via bylaw reform to *shut down* the Kwantlen student newspaper *The Runner,* and erase all its news archives. [See Sun story]

= In Sept. 2024, Kwantlen's Associate VP of Student Affairs wrote to the KSA: "It has come to the University's attention that rumours are circulating regarding potential acts of financial coercion by certain members of the KSA council, which may be aimed at influencing the outcome of the SGM vote…. Should these allegations prove accurate, they may constitute serious violations under both the Societies Act and criminal law." (See attached PDF for this and more KSA problems)

= In Oct. 2024, the Alliance of BC Students (ABCS) placed the KSA in "bad standing," for the society's "alleged behaviour is incompatible with the standards of good governance, service, integrity, leadership, and democracy that are core organizational values at the ABCS and our member associations."

= In Feb. 2025, the BCIT Student Association proposed a policy to contain the KSA as a "rogue actor," because "taken together, along with a number of behaviours that appear to be inappropriate, and in some cases corrupt, in the eyes of a reasonable observer, these actions represent a threat to our sector."

In your view, how indicative of "democracy" and "accountability" is all of the above?

[2] " · Any member of the public can request to view the audited financial statements of a student society. Many student societies (including the Kwantlen and Langara student societies) even publish these on their websites."

This is not correct. Only society members may inspect records (as per Sec. 24 and, 35 of the *Societies Act*), not the public. As well, in 2018, the LSU assured *The Voice* newspaper that its meeting minutes and financial records would be posted online. Then it never did, to this day, as one can note on its website - https://www.langarasu.ca/

Also, these annual reports contain only the most vague general headings - with no line items of individuals' salaries, expenses, bonuses, legal costs, secret loans, etc. There is *no way* for any student to obtain these vital facts (and the societies are excluded from FOI coverage, despite students' pleadings to David Eby for this coverage since 2015).

In 2013, the LSU refused to disclose financial records to the Voice, in violation of the B.C. Societies Act. The LSU's media liaison said she will no longer speak to the media. The LSU prohibited candidates from using social media to campaign in elections, etc. Meanwhile, society staffers - annually paid $112,000+ from mandatory student funds - parade about campus in luxury autos, while poor students and their children depend on college food banks. (P.S. Student fees are voluntary in Australia and New Zealand, as you detailed, and they should be here.)

[3] " · No allegations have been received by the Registrar of Companies or the Minister of Finance."

Students inform me they did send complaints to the Registrar, the Ministers of Finance and PSE, and the Premier – with no satisfactory result.

Students are understandably confused over whether the Finance Ministry or PSE is primarily accountable for student societies, and so they are lost in a legislative Twilight Zone. (This year students also complained to the BC Ombudsman and the BC Auditor General, but were rebuffed by both offices, who claimed to have no jurisdiction over these societies.)

[4] " · To date, the Ministry of Finance has not seen evidence of systematic problems or even substantiated specific cases indicative of regulatory gaps or failures of the Societies Act regime vis-à-vis student societies."

With respect, this is simply delusionary. What can be the basis for this astonishing inaccuracy?

Fiscal and electoral scandals, widely reported in the news media, have plagued B.C. student societies for *half a century*. I have emailed the histories of dozens of these events - via a link to my website https://canadafoi.ca/studentfoi/ - to the Premier, and the Finance and Advanced Education ministers last year.

It is likely that these activities noted – only revealed after strenuous efforts by brave student reporters, LSU whistleblowers, police probes, and external audits - are only the tip of the iceberg. To cite only a few cases:

= The worst practice of some B.C. student societies is the secret granting of loans (funded by students' mandatory fees), with the interest rates and repayment dates - if any - also unpublicized. Here the student treasury is exploited as a vast discretionary piggy bank to reward friends and relatives. The media reports this occurred at Langara, Douglas, and Kwantlen (and likely elsewhere, although students have no legal right to know when it does). Such will occur when teenagers with no managerial training are blindly entrusted with millions of dollars.

= In 2007, more than $750,000 in student funds was misspent, a forensic audit of Kwantlen Student Association finances by PricewaterhouseCoopers has found. About $620,000 was allegedly loaned out by a former KSA executive as part of a high-risk investment, contrary to association rules. See Kwantlen Student Association (KSA)

A man facing drug trafficking charges in Vanderhoof was linked to mysterious loans and undocumented payments to former KSA staff, the audit said.

(**Note:** The new KSA chair said: "They were treating the KSA like it was their personal piggy bank and private club house," and student societies operate under the radar of regulatory oversight. The KSA is a non-profit society under the Society Act, "but the provincial Corporations Registry lacks the regulatory teeth to investigate alleged impropriety.")

= In 2008, the KSA filed a lawsuit in B.C. Supreme Court against a group that once dominated the organization, alleging it misused more than $2 million in student fees to commit fraud, mismanagement and theft. For this, the new KSA general manager received death threats and police protection.

= In 2011, Kwantlen students voted 352 to 0 to remove 13 directors of the Reduce All Fees party after the party's reported misuse of $2 million of student funds. Then the University asked the Victoria (unsuccessfully) to change legislation so KPU can intervene in KSA business to protect the student fees they collect. For updates see the https://ksaleaks.com/ blog.

= Langara College temporarily *stopped* collecting fees for the Langara Students Union (in 1987, in 1989 and 1992), and elections were *voided* due to "irregularities" (in 1995, in 2005 and 2015), and the LSU was nearly re-registered for non-compliance with the Societies Act (in 1983 and in 2000). For the details, see Langara Students' Union. I also recall my Langara journalism colleagues enduring assaults from LSU staffers in the 1990s.

= LSU financial scandals date back to 1976. In 1991, Vancouver Police exhausted their leads into the theft in cash and merchandise from the LSU, and the new Union chairperson said he felt like he had "just entered a den of thieves."

= At Douglas College in 1998, criminal charges were laid against a student society member for improperly cashing 10 cheques. Then in 2006, this College withheld $1.5 million in student fees from its student union, and it applied for the B.C. Supreme Court to appoint a receiver manager to oversee the society's finances, after a review by auditor Ron Parks found appalling abuses.

= At the College of New Caledonia (Prince George) in 2001, RCMP investigated allegations of fraud related to the College Student Association's activities. Then at the University of Victoria in 2002, Saanich police issued an arrest warrant for a former UVic Student Society manager for stealing funds. Police also discovered the society's lack of checks and balances left its financial reporting mechanisms open to abuse.

> And so it goes. In your view, how can the events above and others not be "evidence of systematic problems or even substantiated specific cases" ? (If not this, then what?)

B.C. Premier David Eby, then an MLA, said: "I'm very concerned about the information you presented about what's happening at Langara, as an advocate for open government and transparency at all levels." He was speaking to Langara College students who pleaded for FOI coverage of these entities at a *Legislative Committee to Review the FOIPP Act* on Nov. 18, 2015,

Yet nothing was done. As PSE critic MLA Korky Neufeld noted in his April 8 legislative speech, "These students were hanging on every word, hoping that somebody would follow through and deal with these student unions."

For B.C. students, with their countless sufferings frostily belittled and obdurately brushed away, Briefing Note FIN-2025-51322 is yet another sad measure of the steep uphill struggle they face in Victoria to enlighten ministers, and achieve any measure of justice.

In sum, profiteering and bullying by these state-empowered entities is an urgent, systemic social problem that Victoria would much rather ignore. But the students' pleas for justice over fiscal and ethical chaos will only grow louder over the coming months. At a minimum, Victoria should announce a *public consultation* process on student societies – to hear all the facts and chart a better path for the future. Such a very popular reform would be a proud legacy for officials and MLAs, and a source of immeasurable gratitude for future generations.

Respectfully yours,

Stanley L. Tromp,

BA (UBC political science), Langara Journalism graduate and former LSU fees payer

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P.S. Please see my 5 solutions to the BC student society problems in my Times Colonist editorial, more detailed in my Solutions file. Students are indeed aware of the existing "resolution mechanisms" invoked by Victoria - e.g., the Society Act, the courts, the B.C. Civil Resolution Tribunal – but also know these are all pitifully ineffectual in practice; hence law reform is vital.

Oct. 4, 2025

For Hon Jessie Sunner, Minister of Post-Secondary Education:

College students across B.C. are ever more profoundly concerned about serious problems for the past 50 years within their "student societies."

Langara Student Union staffers are paid $112,000+ yearly on average (the exact numbers are secret), nearly as much as an MLA. One source tells me four Kwantlen Polytechnic Association executives, fully employed elsewhere, get about $1,000 a week during their term.

Students complain that society elections are rigged each autumn to guarantee the staffers' friends winning, and lock out newcomers. Then, teenagers with no managerial training are entrusted to spend millions of dollars of students' mandatory fees and taxpayers' money, mostly in secret, with *no* external oversight. What could go wrong there? (In current practice – everything, e.g., loans to friends, and dozens of scandals.)

At the website on this issue – www.canadafoi.ca/studentfoi - you can see my 2024 op-ed, a good intro to the topic, with 5 solutions.

Oddly, these societies staffers' profits are rising within this context: KPU lays off 45 additional staff as international student enrolment plummets Sept. 18, 2025 / Langara College bracing for

drastic drop in foreign students [about 80%], Vancouver Sun, July 25, 2024 / At Langara, 200 faculty members have lost work, March 21, 2025

The B.C. legislature opens Oct. 6, and it is like to be raised again there, as it was by the opposition PSE critic, MLA Korky Neufeld (250- 387-3507), in his House speech of April 8, 2025.

(The speech was posted on Instagram here and here by the International Students Union with 3,161 likes, and the ISU added: "After countless efforts, this critical issue has finally been raised in the BC Legislative Assembly…. Now, we hope the government takes strong action against those misusing student funds.")

The college's presidents and boards appear deaf to students' pleas. (The new post-secondary education minister Jessie Sunner is also Surrey MLA for the Kwantlen main campus.) Yet in 2015, MLA David Eby told students: "I'm very concerned about the information you presented about what's happening at Langara, as an advocate for open government…." Then nothing happened.

An end to this long-festering sore would be a great service for the province. Such a very popular reform would be a proud legacy for officials and MLAs, and a source of immeasurable gratitude for future generations, and indeed such action could restore B.C. students' faith in their government as a caring protector.

Sincerely yours,

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Langara Journalism graduate and former LSU fees payer

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https://runnermag.ca/2025/09/ksa-in-1-5-million-deficit-spent-over-double-the-legal-fees-budget-in-6-months/

KSA in $1.5 million deficit, spent over double the legal fees budget in 6 months

Sept. 8, 2025. The Runner, KPU. By Sukhmani Sandhu

The Kwantlen Student Association is in an almost $1.5 million deficit, according to its June 2025 proposed draft budget. The majority of KSA funding comes from students through membership fees.

The largest deficit within the student union's operations budget is under legal and professional fees. Although the approved budget for the 2025 fiscal year was $200,000, the KSA spent a total $431,311 on legal and professional fees from January to June, more than double the allotted

amount for 2025. By February, the KSA had spent $176,930 in legal and professional fees — 88 per cent of the year's total budget.

Canada Student Union NEWS. [Relevant for Langara and Kwantlen]

University of Regina Students' Union under investigation

CTV News. Aug. 29, 2025

The Regina Police Service confirmed on Aug. 28 that the University of Regina Students' Union (URSU) is under investigation due to possible misappropriation of funds. The union is no longer recognized by the University and was evicted from campus last month, because an auditor's report showed URSU's finances were unsustainable.

Back in April, URSU filed an injunction against the university for withholding fees and terminating the union's fee collection agreement. On July 30, that injunction was dismissed by a judge at Court of King's Bench judge, due in part to URSU's recent track record, including financial concerns.

Students have long had questions about URSU executive's salaries and how student funds are used. The student paper said: "It seemed like the amount of money going towards salaries and wages just kept increasing, even though it felt like the services the students were receiving were decreasing."

U of O student union approves external review of finances | CBC News

Student federation facing allegations funds were used for personal use

CBC News, Aug 12, 2018

In 2018, the University of Ottawa said it will no longer recognize its student federation as the official voice for students following allegations its members misappropriated funds. The student paper reported that Ottawa police are investigating members of the SFUO for misappropriation of funds for personal use. The University of Ottawa said its representatives met with the SFUO executive committee to request an immediate forensic audit of the federation's accounts.

The board of the Student Federation of the University of Ottawa (SFUO) has voted unanimously to allow an outside firm to take a look at its finances following allegations that members mismanaged student funds. Then in 2019, undergraduate students voted to replace the Student Federation of the University of Ottawa with a new student union through a referendum.