

THE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION OF MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY

STUDENT LIFE STARTS HERE.

Annual Report 2019/20

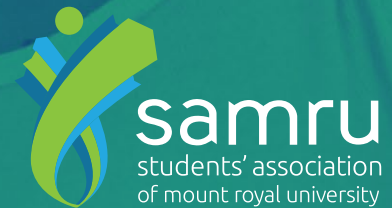


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A MESSAGE TO OUR MEMBERS

The 2019-20 year was one of responsiveness, renewal, and resilience for the Students' Association of Mount Royal University (SAMRU) — a year that included a fresh, student-focused approach to delivering member value, continued delivery of impactful services and programs, a renewed strategic plan, successful representation and advocacy campaigns, and finding new ways to reach and to support our members from a distance during a global pandemic.

SAMRU's Representation Executive Council (REC) once again focused on encouraging students to pledge to vote, this time in the federal elections; they also organized students to oppose tuition increases, continued to work on bringing a student refugee program to campus, and responded to students experiencing the major disruptions and displacements resulting from COVID-related restrictions. Of note was the advocacy work done to improve student safety on campus — particularly as it relates to dating, domestic, and sexual violence — which ensured critical information will be available online and in all classrooms and made certain that a number of key recommendations were delivered to the provincial government.

SAMRU's Student Governing Board (SGB) is collectively the highest decision-making body of SAMRU, providing strategic direction and oversight of all aspects of the organization's work. This year, the board reviewed and updated key policies, hired a new Speaker, and continued to receive regular governance support and training. The Board's primary focus, however, was on renewing and updating SAMRU's Strategic Plan — a process that took several months and included extensive research and broad stakeholder feedback and engagement.

Gathering, listening, and responding to students' feedback led SAMRU to close its pub/restaurant formerly known as the Hub and spend the summer reworking the concept to better meet students' stated priorities of expanded social opportunities and improved food service. West Gate Social (WGS) opened just prior to the Fall 2019 semester with a student-centred, value-focused business model offering low member pricing for food and beverages in a refreshed gathering space. Students responded positively to the changes, demonstrated by increased traffic, anecdotal feedback, and their high ranking of the new service in our annual survey — all of which validated the significant but necessary shift in delivering this member service.

Of course, things changed profoundly in mid-March 2020 when COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic. The campus closed suddenly, with only a few essential staff remaining while most faculty and students had to shift online to finish classes from their homes. Additional representation priorities arose as a result, including advocating for a pass/fail for students at the end of the winter semester and responding to new stresses and complications related to the sudden switch from in-person to online learning.

With an uncharacteristic absence on campus of staff, faculty, and most importantly — our members — SAMRU quickly put new health and safety measures in place to protect staff and volunteers who remained on campus, while also re-prioritizing work to ensure students could still access important services and programs from a distance.

While there were challenges and learning opportunities along the way, the collective efforts of people coming together during a crisis ensured that SAMRU remained nimble and resilient so it could continue its mission of representing and serving students to help them succeed.

AT A GLANCE

108

Emergency student loans and emergency student bursaries disbursed

74

Calgary Food Bank (CFB) hampers given out

596

SAMRU food and hygiene cupboard hampers given out

70

Mount Caring gift cards given out

\$5,769

Funds raised for the Peer Support Centre through the Fundrace Flurry campaign

72

Students who contacted Student Advocacy and the Resource Centre (SARC) for academic and non-academic support

94

Formal cases supported through the Student Advocacy and Resource Centre

82

Clubs ratified

164

Trained club executives

178

Club events in Fall 2019

194

Volunteers who recorded hours

249

Volunteer hours contributed to the community garden

2500

Students who pledged to vote in the 2019 federal elections

85

Tax returns processed at the SAMRU Free Tax clinic

13

Students who completed the Pinnacle Challenge

\$41,000

Money given to students through SAMRU Awards

\$25,580

Given to students from the Experiential Learning Fund (ELF)

241

Students purchased books from the Fall 2019 Used Book Sale

LISTENING TO STUDENTS

Listening to, learning from, and including our members helps SAMRU adapt to the evolving needs of a constantly changing membership and remain relevant. SAMRU seeks feedback from students in multiple ways: through our annual Student Satisfaction and Awareness Survey, informal polls, direct feedback and conversations, and student advisory committees, among other approaches. SAMRU seeks patterns, studies best practices, adopts improvements, and evaluates our progress in order to use resources effectively, demonstrate transparency, and continue to deliver valuable and relevant services.


MEMBER FEEDBACK HELPS GUIDE SAMRU'S STRATEGIC PLAN


The **SAMRU Member Feedback Survey** was conducted in October 2019 to get a sense of member's challenges, gauge their satisfaction and awareness of the Students' Association, and gain insight into what they thought SAMRU's goals and priorities should be between now and the next strategic planning year.

The goal of this particular survey was to use the aggregate feedback to make changes to our strategic plan. The opinions of SAMRU members in this survey helped shape an understanding of how well SAMRU is meeting its mission and where it might need to focus attention in the future.

HIGHLIGHTS

1,266 Student participants

 **319** Saw accumulation of significant tuition debt as the most important

 **711** Felt SAMRU should continue to focus on helping students address their needs with support services

 **539** Would like to know more about SAMRU's Support Services

 **635** Associated SAMRU with the word "accepting"

STUDENTS FIND BENEFIT IN SAMRU SERVICES

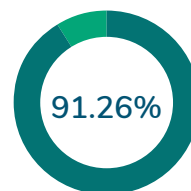
The **Student Satisfaction and Awareness Survey (SSAS)** is conducted annually to get a sense of members' awareness, usage, and satisfaction with services provided by SAMRU. The seventh annual version of this survey was conducted in April 2020.

Overall, the information gathered is used to gauge the need for adjusting SAMRU services. The survey asked members about a broad range of services in keeping with the SAMRU's mission of representing and serving students to help them succeed. The opinions of SAMRU members in this survey help us gauge how well SAMRU is meeting that mission and where it might need to focus attention in the future.

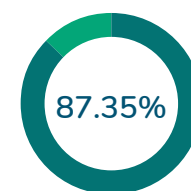
HIGHLIGHTS

528
Student participants

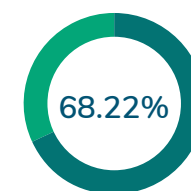
The three most frequently used services were



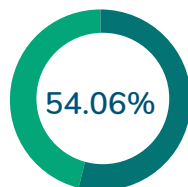
Wyckham House food kiosks



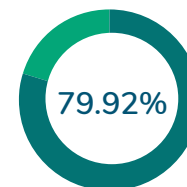
Amenities such as charging stations and vending machines



West Gate Social



The service with which students were most unaware or lacking information was the **Student Advocacy Office**



The service viewed as having the most benefit was **amenities**. This includes tables and seating, lounge spaces, microwaves, cellphone charging stations, bank machines, vending machines, and washrooms in Wyckham House.



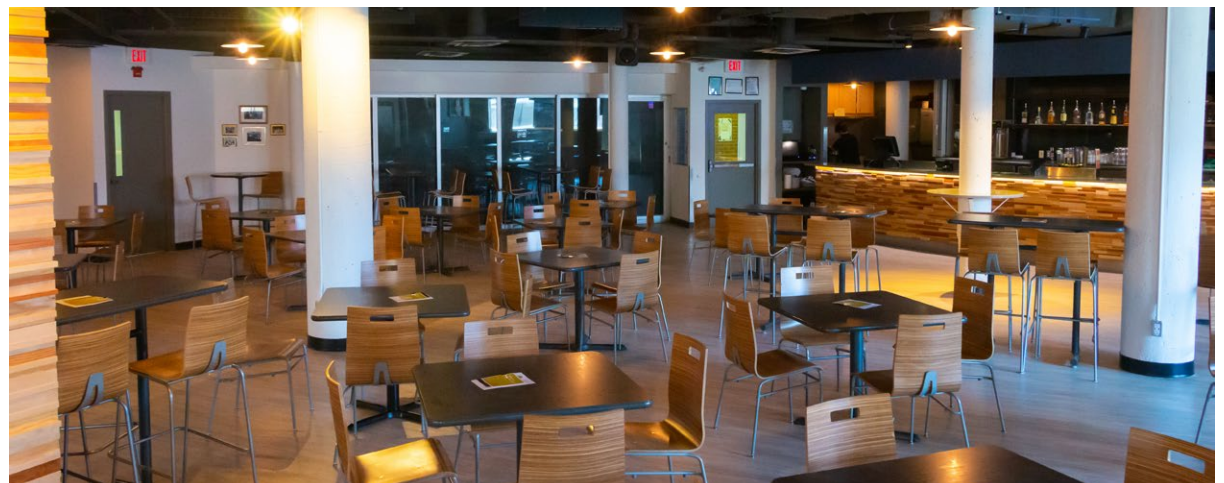
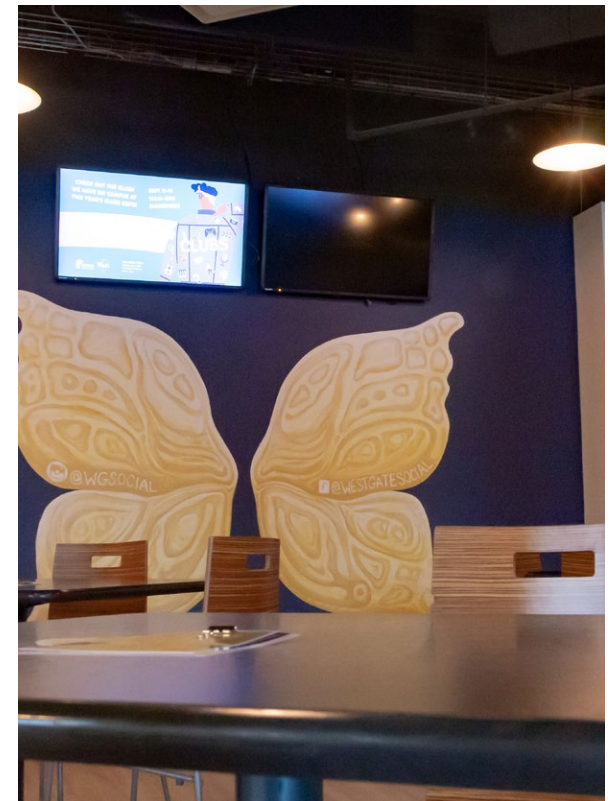
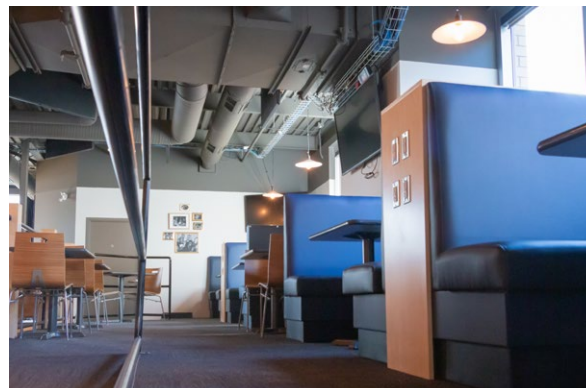
The **email newsletter** was indicated as the preferred method of communication to receive information about SAMRU services

WEST GATE SOCIAL: A NEW GATHERING PLACE FOR STUDENTS

In 2019, SAMRU collected extensive student feedback about its restaurant/pub, the Hub, with the goal of better meeting students' priorities. In their feedback, students ranked social opportunities and food service their top outcomes for a student lounge.

SAMRU set a goal to revise the lounge in order to lower barriers for attendance, create a bright and inviting environment for relaxing and socializing and provide more flexibility and choice to students. The new venture, called **West Gate Social**, opened in the Fall 2019 semester. In addition to a refreshed and renovated space, West Gate Social also brought in a value-focused business model offering low-priced food and beverage for SAMRU members. Additionally, members were encouraged to see West Gate Social as a **lounge and gathering space**, allowing outside food and beverages to provide a greater variety of choices.

Member response to West Gate Social was very positive; feedback from SAMRU's annual Student Satisfaction and Awareness Survey ranked it **among the top SAMRU services**, and anecdotal feedback from students suggested that students were happy to have a lively and affordable social space.



“

*It's a great spot to meet and
have a snack with friends.*

- Student Satisfaction & Awareness Survey 2020

”





“

University is a great time to make new friends, and we hope West Gate Social becomes the place for students to connect on campus.

- John Hadley, Director of Business and Building Services,
MRU Media Room, Sept 2019

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GOVERNANCE

SAMRU's Student Governing Board (SGB) is dedicated to providing exceptional governance to ensure the effectiveness of itself and the organization. The Board employs a **governance coach** who attends board meetings to offer training and support. This helps ensure SAMRU Governors have access to objective guidance from a governance expert. The support and training provides a real benefit to our student Governors and helps shape their involvement in the broader community into the future.

This year, the Board said farewell to their Speaker, **Amber Clark**, who completed her two-year term in the position, and welcomed a new Speaker, **Ashley Schreiner**. The Speaker's primary role is to guide the board in their meeting procedures and to ensure that the board attends to its annual work cycle. Another role of the Speaker is to act as a liaison between the organization's governance, representation, and operational functions.

The Board's primary focus this year was the **2020-2025 SAMRU Strategic Plan**. The Student Governing Board is responsible for determining and communicating the strategic direction of the organization. To meet this outcome the SGB directed SAMRU management to undertake a strategic planning process which included

extensive research, stakeholder feedback and engagement, and support from CoreMatters Consulting. The Board approved the 2020-2025 plan in the winter of 2020, which included SAMRU's mission and vision, defined the organization's values, and organizational goals and objectives.

The Board's other areas of focus over the year included improvements to their finance policies, board building to ensure that Governor positions were filled by qualified students, and a quick response to the pandemic. The Board worked with SAMRU's senior management and the Representation Executive Council (REC) to ensure that students had access to the supports that they would need during the difficult time, as well as reinforcing the long-term stability of the organization.



From left to right: Dustin Hertel, Maggie Thaxter, Gracia Di N'zau Mbudi, Lucas Hardardt, Matt Mickelson, Shayla Breen, Ian Lees, and Amber Clark

Not pictured: Erik Overland, Justin Nicholson, and Josh Benner

REPRESENTATION

SAMRU's Representation Executive Council (REC) focused on a number of priorities this year, including: advocating for increased campus safety related to sexual violence, working with their counterparts locally, provincially, and federally to deal with emerging and systemic issues affecting students, encouraging students to get involved with the democratic process, organizing information campaigns and demonstrations, continuing to champion a student refugee program at MRU, and dealing with a broad range of student concerns emerging from the COVID-19 restrictions and campus closure.

WORKING TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

A notable initiative this year was the development of the Campus Sexual Violence white paper outlining five recommendations for the Government of Alberta to act upon to end sexual violence on Alberta university campuses, brought forward by SAMRU REC President Shayla Breen. This campaign coincided with a SAMRU initiative on campus to provide an easily accessible **collection of resources for dating, domestic, and sexual violence issues** students may face. The resources will be in every classroom on campus when in-person classes resume. The initiative, raised by SAMRU

VP Student Affairs Kainat Javed, is currently featured on the [MRU website](#).

DEALING WITH GOVERNMENT FUNDING CUTS AND TUITION INCREASES

SAMRU representatives worked with their provincial counterparts at the Council of

Alberta University Students (CAUS) on several advocacy initiatives voicing students' concerns about the **2020 provincial budget** that imposed significant post-secondary funding cuts and tuition increases of up to 22.5% over three years. Student leaders argued that such deep cuts combined with significant cost increases



From left to right: Kainat Javed (Vice-President Student Affairs), Luc Carels (Vice-President External), Shayla Breen (President), and Nathan Lawley (Vice-President Academic)

would harm quality and services, reduce access, add to already high student debt loads, and potentially push young people to leave the province to study and work elsewhere.

Student leaders were also disappointed to see the elimination of the Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP), multi-year reductions in infrastructure investments, the removal of student consultation requirements and non-instructional fee caps from the post-secondary tuition and fees regulation, as well as issues with the proposed performance-based funding models.

STUDENTS ORGANIZING TO HAVE THEIR SAY

The REC team hosted a **silent demonstration** that saw several students holding signs and delivering personal letters at a Board of Governors meeting, noting their opposition to the proposed tuition and other fee increases for the following year. As a result of this advocacy, the Board approved a request for a quarter of the 7% tuition increase be redirected into bursaries for low-income students — a fund that now stands at \$1 million.

SAMRU also held a successful **Get Out The Vote (GOTV) campaign** for the 2019 federal election. The campaign included two events collecting pledges to vote from students in exchange for doughnuts and ice-cream, and a Q&A session in Wyckham House with local federal candidates running in the election.

SAMRU's VP External, Luc Carels, the REC team, SAMRU volunteers, and governors, were proud to get **2,500 students** to pledge to vote.

IMPACT OF COVID RESTRICTIONS ON STUDENTS

When pandemic restrictions resulted in a full campus closure that caused classes to rapidly move online, many students expressed their anxieties related to the sudden changes in learning and the impacts that it could have on their final grades. SAMRU's VP Academic, Nathan Lawley, sought out and shared aggregate student feedback with MRU to demonstrate the impact COVID-19 was having on students' overall well-being, advocating for a simplified grading scheme. A **pass/fail grading scheme** was introduced by MRU as a direct response to this initiative.

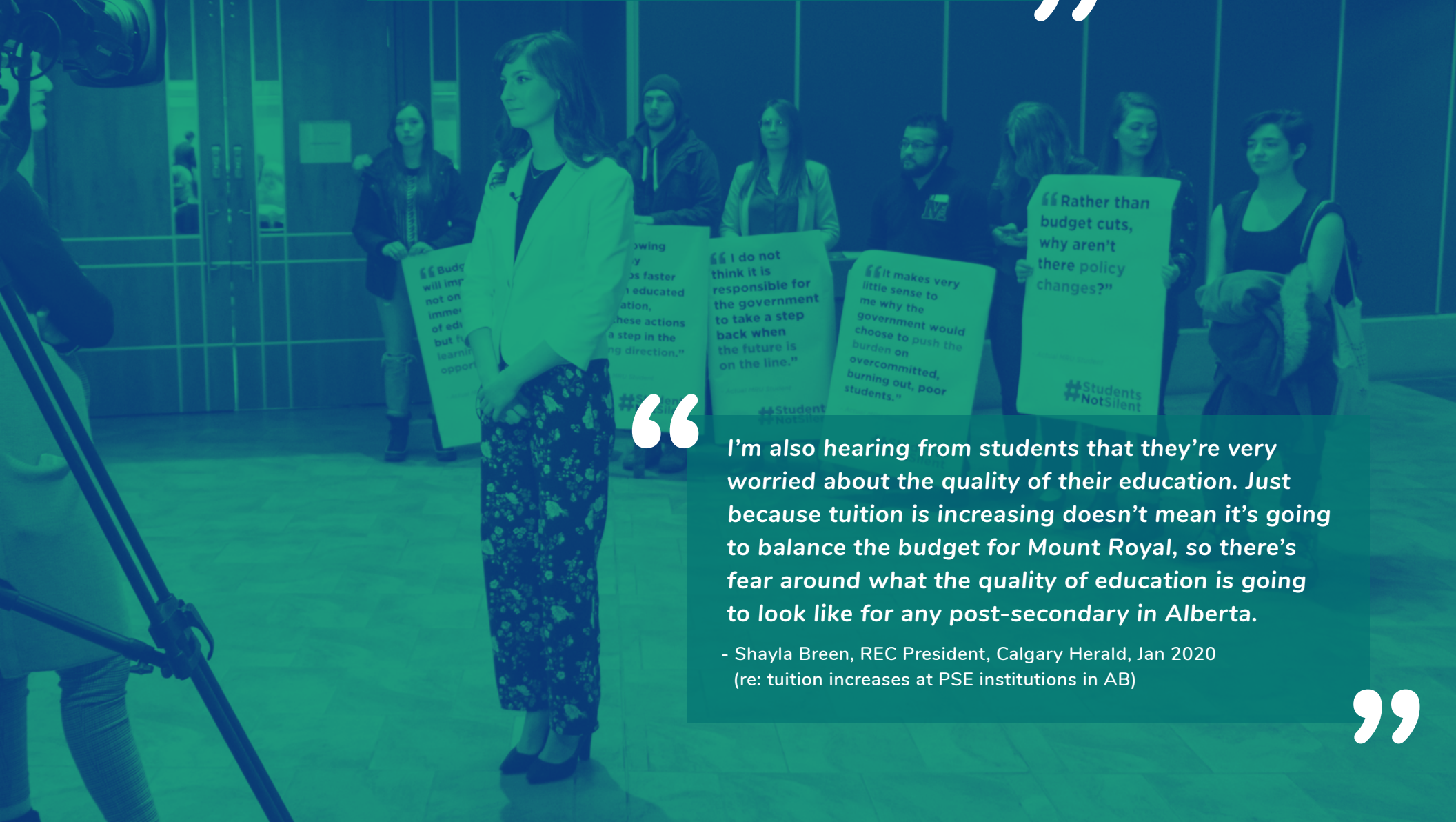


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It was shocking to me to find out through the orders in council that students have been taken out of the process of things like exceptional tuition increases.

- Shayla Breen, REC President, 660 News, Dec 2019
(re: non-mandatory student fee cap lifted)

”




“

I'm also hearing from students that they're very worried about the quality of their education. Just because tuition is increasing doesn't mean it's going to balance the budget for Mount Royal, so there's fear around what the quality of education is going to look like for any post-secondary in Alberta.

- Shayla Breen, REC President, Calgary Herald, Jan 2020
(re: tuition increases at PSE institutions in AB)

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The background image is a monochromatic blue-toned photograph of an outdoor event. In the foreground, there is an ice cream stand with a sign that reads "ICE CREAM" in large, white, block letters. Below the sign, there are four smaller signs listing flavors: "Salted Caramel", "Melted Chocolate", "Toasted Coconut", and "Dairy Free Strawberry". To the left of the stand, there are several large, shiny, metallic balloons. In the background, a group of young people, likely students, are gathered. A young man with a backpack is in the center, looking towards a young woman on the right. Other students are visible behind them, some looking at their phones. The overall scene suggests a school fair or a community event.

“ One of the main reasons we’re doing this—at SAMRU and I’m sure a lot of other institutions across the country—is that democracy is incredibly important and for that to work, more participation, more involvement is always better.

- Luc Carels, VP External, Calgary Journal, Sept 2019
(re: GOTV)

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MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

COVID TRANSITION

When the COVID-19 global pandemic was declared in March, SAMRU knew our program and support offerings needed to change drastically and immediately began contingency planning. Once the MRU campus was officially closed and people were directed to learn and work from home, we quickly created **alternatives to in-person service delivery**.

Key services — peer support and student academic and non-academic advocacy services, as well as several programs like emergency loans and bursaries, food and hygiene hampers, referrals, SAMRU awards, and stress relief programming — were quickly reimaged and shifted online. Other work included listening and responding to anxious students, finding and posting helpful internal and external resources for our members, and communicating any changes the university made that impacted students.

Our website traffic reflected students' concerns: overall traffic was up by **88%** in March and April, with top searches including: COVID-19 updates and precautions, followed by health and dental benefits (up by 41%), a blog post regarding changes to



88%

Increase in website traffic in March and April 2020

MRU's grading scheme for winter 2020, and a COVID-19 resources page.

While our members faced their own unique set of challenges as students in a pandemic, the SAMRU board, representatives, employees, and volunteers were facing their own. Our organization adapted by learning new technologies and discovering new ways to connect, all whilst navigating the difficulties of a pandemic.

Everyone put forward their best efforts; cross-functional teams were quickly formed, with team members contributing their unique expertise and insight to ensuring our programs, services, and advocacy adequately met and addressed the ever-growing list of challenges students faced. Everyone at SAMRU was determined to put students first and did their best to help our members during this unexpected and extraordinary event.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

SAMRU renewed its **health and safety system** between December 2019 and the end of February 2020 by offering training to key individuals, by developing the Health and Safety Committee, and by revising and approving a set of related health and safety policies and procedures. This work formed a critical foundation for the updates and changes necessitated by the pandemic restrictions in March 2020. SAMRU was able to quickly build a pandemic and business continuity plan, conduct the necessary hazard assessments relating to COVID-19 and develop COVID-19 specific procedures, including working from home procedures, to address the unique needs of the situation.



WYCKHAM HOUSE

SAMRU has long recognized the value of a student-governed space on campus that can provide its members services, social gathering spaces, study space and revenue opportunities. A lot of work goes on behind the scenes to ensure that these spaces are kept in good repair without disrupting students' activities.

The absence of students on campus because of COVID-19 restrictions provided SAMRU a rare opportunity to **renovate** a variety of spaces in the building so that it can better serve members when they return.



COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS

With new and rapidly changing restrictions due to the pandemic, SAMRU adapted by transitioning services and programs online and effectively communicating the changes with students. Having signed an information sharing agreement with MRU in early 2019 following many years without access to member emails, we were quickly and easily able to communicate directly with students, providing concise and important information that they needed to see.

The effectiveness of this strategy was demonstrated by the fact that SAMRU's email open rates continued to remain higher than industry standard at **69%**, with an audience of over **12,000 students**. On average, **5%** of our audience clicked on a link in one of our emails. Much of our increased website traffic can be attributed to links within our monthly mass email, demonstrated by a **285%** increase in email referrals to the website over this period.

SAMRU video views have also grown dramatically compared to the previous year. As students' appetite for video content continues to increase, SAMRU has adapted much of its content strategy to include more digital media to remain relevant and ensure our messages align with our audience's expectations.



Email audience of over
12,000
students



On average,
5 %
clicked on a link in one
of our emails



69%
Email open rate



285%
Increase in email referrals
to the website

FUNDRACE FLURRY

In response to declining engagement and donations for SAMRU's annual Season of Caring fundraiser, we decided it was time for a revamp of one of our most used support programs.

Enter, Fundrace Flurry: an **all-new seasonal fundraiser** that challenges our friends at MRU to form teams and compete against one another to fundrace to the finish line before their peers. With this transformed format, SAMRU hoped to build stronger relationships within our campus community and re-energize MRU's giving spirit. All funds raised went toward SAMRU's Peer Support Centre to support the food and financial programming operating through the centre, including seasonal gift hampers.



The MRU community responded enthusiastically to the campaign, with our illustrated mascots (with over 90 variations!), and to the new online delivery format using Canada Helps. With the incredible support of MRU students, clubs, staff, and faculty, we were able to raise **over \$5,700**, surpassing our \$5,000 goal.

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

SAMRU participates in a number of collaborative projects with community partners every year. In the 2019-20 academic year, SAMRU partnered with over 40 groups (clubs, departments, institutes, faculty, community organizations, and individuals) to bring special programs and events to the students of MRU.

Due to the pandemic outbreak in early 2020, a number of partnerships were cancelled, or put on hold.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Wild Rose Brewery sponsored SAMRU's **Fundrace Flurry** first annual winter fundraiser! Our friends at the brewery provided a donation match (up to \$250) for the winning fundraising team, as well as a free tasting for all the fundraising participants in West Gate Social.
- In fall 2019, SAMRU's Student Advocacy Resource and Cultural and Indigenous Inclusion centres piloted a **peer-to-peer advocacy program** with MRU's Iniskim Centre. Weekly outreach sessions were held to speak with students about their academic and non-academic concerns.
- Our partnership with **Fresh Routes mobile grocery store** continued in the 2019-20 academic year, beyond the pilot stage, as students raved about the program and asked for it to return to campus.



- SAMRU's partnership with MRU's Transitional Vocational Program (TVP) was strengthened as our annual **food drive** was expanded to be an ongoing Fall/Winter initiative, providing much-appreciated work experience for these students.
- SAMRU held its first **Sexpo Week** in the fall of 2019, providing students, local organizations, and individuals the opportunity to connect with one another. This event helped bring awareness to the on- and off- campus sexual health and identity resources available to our diverse community of students.
- Prior to the pandemic closures that occurred in March 2020, a partnership with the Indigenous Gathering Place was agreed upon for SAMRU's annual **Round Dance**. This partnership is on hold until such time that we can return to in-person programs and events.



FINANCIALS

SAMRU's key financial objectives are to ensure the stability, long- term sustainability, and value of the organization through transparent and accountable governance, consistent and effective management, principled representation, social and environmental responsibility, and successful operations.

Careful planning and responsible spending helps SAMRU ensure crisis reserves are maintained and capital replacement funds are available to sustain the organization long into the future.

Included in the overall value of the organization is the \$21M Wyckham House Student Centre, which was built and is maintained with significant investment from generations of members who contributed for the benefit of future students.

Our solid financial foundation allows us to deliver value to our members by meeting our mission of representing and serving students so they can succeed.

For a full copy of our audited financial statements, please go to samru.ca/2020financials and scroll down to the audited financials section.

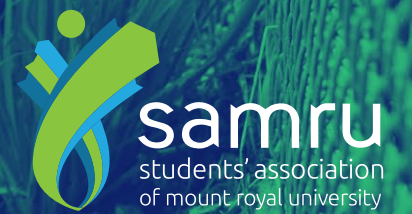
FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Public health restrictions related to COVID-19 required the Wyckham House Student Centre to shut down suddenly in the final quarter of the fiscal year. While this caused a major disruption to its business operations, tenant rental agreements, and commercial partnerships, SAMRU was able to quickly transition and adapt its business model to online delivery of programs and services, and significantly reduce costs to offset the ancillary revenue losses.
- The external audit of SAMRU's financial statements was completed by the professional accounting firm Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) and received an unqualified audit opinion* and no management recommendation letter. This is a clear testament to SAMRU's sound financial management practices and strong internal controls.
- SAMRU continues to demonstrate that through responsible governance oversight and a clear policy framework it is well positioned to deal with turbulent fluctuations and uncertainty and still remain viable to represent and serve its members long into the future.

**An unqualified opinion means that an independent auditor (PwC in this case) concluded that SAMRU's financial statements were presented fairly in all material aspects and in compliance with Accounting Standards for Not-For-Profit Organizations (ASNPO).*



CONCO



   @samrubuzz samru.ca