



Alma Mater Society of  
UBC Vancouver

# Quarterly Executive Report

Tom Dvorak, Vice-President Finance

September 24, 2009 to November 18, 2009

# Table of Contents

## Opening Remarks

The Problem

How This Happened

What Needs to Happen

## Staff Updates

## AMS Committees

AMS/GSS Extended Health and Dental Plan Committee

Appointments Review Committee

Budget Committee (Chair)

Business Operations Committee (Chair)

Finance Commission

Fundraising & Sponsorship Committee

Hiring Committees

Human Resources Committee (Chair)

Impacts Committee (Chair)

Information Technology Planning Group (Chair)

Renovations Planning Group

SUB Renewal Committee

## External Committees

Alumni Association Board of Directors

Canadian Students' Horizons Group

CiTR Board of Directors

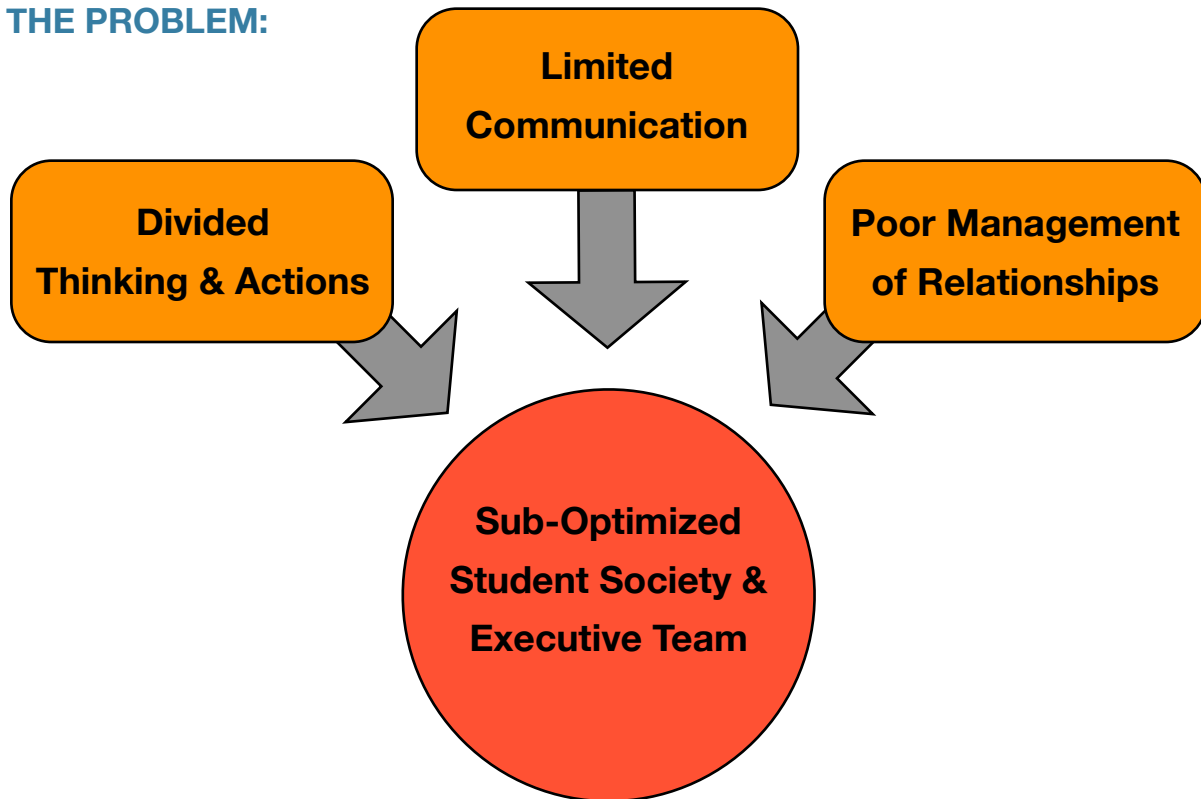
Walter Gage Memorial Fund Committee

# THINGS HAVE GONE SIDEWAYS

## Opening Remarks

Reading over my last quarterly remarks, I cannot help but be amazed at how things have changed. I wavered for quite some time on what to include in the content of this quarterly, and I credit my ultimate decision to members of the Oversight Committee and a candid discussion I had with them just last week. It was a real wake-up call that helped me realign my thoughts. What follows is my perspective on the current state of AMS leadership. As you review this, please bare in mind that a great deal of fantastic work is still accomplished by every AMS executive. There has, however, been a chain of events that has led to this work being done in a manner that completely fails to maximize the potential of our student society.


## THE PROBLEM:



**Divided Thinking & Actions** - Members of our executive tend to see issues differently, and have often taken aggressive actions to see their point of view put forward. Rather than realizing synergies through constructive discussions at the executive level, political power plays occur in order to approve or fail motions at Council. At times these actions fail to adhere to even basic standards of professionalism or mutual respect. As an example, I was personally attacked in public forums by a fellow executive while bringing forth a Whistler Lodge pricing policy proposal.

**Limited Communication** - There has been an inadequate amount of connection and communication between executives over the past 3 months. Rarely is more than half of the executive in the office at the same time, and for various reasons, our traditional Executive Committee meetings have almost consistently been cancelled this fall. There have been two instances where I have had to force the regularly scheduled meeting to occur, feeling that I am fighting another executive member on the merits of having the meeting. When trying to include this executive remotely, the response I received was “I don’t want to call in - I have to work on my quarterly.” When these meetings do occur, often controversial issues are not brought up before they appear at Council. For example, the code change involving a disabled students’ seat was not mentioned when I asked “does anyone know of items coming to Council?” A small executive meeting does occur just before the start of Council, but this is often too late to modify the motions coming forward in a manner that would unify executive views.

**Poor Management of Relationships** - Perhaps the most damaging element of the current AMS Executive is the manner in which external relationships are sometimes handled. In several cases this year, one or more executive members has treated an external stakeholder without an appropriate level of dignity or respect. This has often resulted in this external stakeholder reaching out to me with a “desire to work with the AMS, but only in a professional manner where they are not personally offended or attacked.” By being in touch with these stakeholders, I often learn of eye-opening information that should have been shared with me as an executive beforehand. There are times where information presented to me by an external contact is completely inconsistent with what I am led to believe internally. At present, there are several independent external relationships where I continue to be contacted in order to keep adequate information flowing.



**Sub-Optimized Student Society & Executive Team** - These factors have led to the creation of a work environment where some executives hold feelings of distrust or disrespect towards one another. As a result, work is performed within individual silos because the intellectual desire to work together is no longer there. The executive as a whole no longer drives programs or initiatives to Council. It is a disconnected group of individuals running down different paths, doing Council, the AMS, and its members a disservice.

## HOW THIS HAPPENED:

“Banality of Evil” is a phrase coined by Hannah Arendt and incorporated in the title of her 1963 work *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. It describes the thesis that the great evils in history generally, and the Holocaust in particular, were not executed by fanatics or sociopaths but rather by ordinary people who accepted the premises of their state and therefore participated with the view that their actions were normal.

Comparing myself and my fellow executive to war criminals is fairly drastic, but I honestly feel that Arendt’s thesis applies to the past few months at the AMS. Everyone on the executive is responsible for where we are today. Each of us has contributed to one or more of the problem areas mentioned above through either our actions or our inaction. Now we are at a point where we have slipped into and have been working in such a broken environment for so long that we all accept it as our way of doing business. Limiting interaction and working independently has seemed easier for all of us. We have come to accept the premises of our state and have participated with the view that our actions are normal.

It wasn't until an Oversight Committee meeting last week that I personally awoke to see just how badly the wheels had come off. The genuine, shocked reaction of a Councillor to my comment about the lack of Executive Committee meetings was a much-needed awakening.

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN:

- 1)** Full disclosure of the present situation needs to occur. If you've read this far, then we can move on to step two.
- 2)** Executive Committee meetings need to happen weekly and without exception. The first item on tomorrow's agenda needs to be a frank discussion of exactly what events led to today. An update of what everyone is working on and a discussion of immediate and upcoming Council agenda items needs to occur regularly moving forward.
- 3)** The Oversight Committee, in conjunction with the Executive Committee and our new HR function, should design and implement mechanisms for aligning and realigning the executive team to prevent this kind of breakdown from happening in future years. These mechanisms should include provisions for peer feedback as well as performance appraisal.



While the comments above may sound all “doom and gloom,” there do continue to be many positive aspects of my work which can be read in detail throughout the remainder of this quarterly. I greatly enjoy many aspects of my contributions to the AMS and feel that I can continue to drive value to this organization in the coming months.

Again, I'd like to thank the members of Oversight Committee. Without their work, much of this may have never come to the surface. I hope that some of the actionable points above can be examined further with the goal of setting in place measures for future years. Finally, if any of this strikes a tone with you and your work within your own organization, I urge you to pause and reflect. Ask yourself what you may be doing through actions or inaction that may be sub-optimizing the operation.

Take care,

-Tom Dvorak

## Staff Updates

A lot of the great work that comes out of my portfolio could not happen without my dedicated staff. They've all continued to work hard despite academic obligations and constraints this fall.

Associate Vice-President Finance

**Catherine Metrycki** - [avpfinance@ams.ubc.ca](mailto:avpfinance@ams.ubc.ca)

Catherine wrapped up with acceptance of club and constituency budgets several weeks ago, and has since been sifting through piles of waivers and is now looking at possibly reforming some of the ways we assign deadlines for club and constituency compliance.

Financial Orientations Coordinator

**Edwin Chan** - [finorientations@ams.ubc.ca](mailto:finorientations@ams.ubc.ca)

Edwin has more or less wrapped up treasurers' orientations for this year. This has left him with time to assist in other aspects of Fin Com as well as assist me in other project areas such as student internship coordination. If you've read this report in time for the Nov. 18th council meeting, be the first to mention this paragraph during my executive remarks for a free lunch at the AMS.

Business Promotions Coordinator

**Mike Brown** - [businesspromotions@ams.ubc.ca](mailto:businesspromotions@ams.ubc.ca)

Mike brought forth a proposal that was approved by BOC for a campaign to increase recognition of AMS outlets. This should be launching early in the new year. He has also put in an amazing amount of work in conducting surveys at our outlets. His analysis of this data has resulted in some very enlightening discussions at BOC.

Sustainability Coordinator

**Joyce Shen** - [sustainability@ams.ubc.ca](mailto:sustainability@ams.ubc.ca)

Joyce and I gave a mid-year update to council earlier this month on the work that's been done largely thanks to Joyce's commitment and drive. Some of the things she's continuing to work on are updates to our website, compostable cutlery, and eradicating bottled water from the UBC campus.

## AMS Committees

**Note:** Transition into the new committee system has consciously delayed action on items that cannot be guaranteed to wrap up before the end of the year

### **Hiring Committees**

I was unable to attend the hiring of the Elections Administrator and Safety Coordinator recently, but otherwise these committees have been relatively inactive. Hiring was a long and grueling process this year. Thanks again to all councillors who contributed!

### **AMS/GSS Extended Health and Dental Plan Committee**

This committee received an end of opt-out period update on our enrollment statistics, and a similar update was presented to Council at our last meeting. I was also fortunate enough to attend a Stakeholder Meeting of Studentcare in Montreal where several of their clients were gathered to help drive strategic direction for the company.

### **Budget Committee (Chair)**

The budget was completed and submitted to council back in July, completing this committee's main role for the year. Since then it's been reviewing some follow-up budget requests and made a decision not to continue with a structural audit along with Oversight Committee as this would constitute strategic planning and would be outside of the committee's mandate.

### **Business Operations Committee (Chair)**

This committee put together a proposal earlier this term to rent out the Whistler Lodge for several hundred thousand dollars, but this proposal was ultimately not adopted. We've also been looking at the comprehensive results of Mike Brown's business survey, and are developing some action items moving forward. A key project that I've personally taken on is looking forward at how to integrate more hands-on student learning into our business operations.

### **Human Resources Committee (Chair)**

We were pleased to hire David Hannigan earlier this term and help him get settled at the AMS. We look forward to seeing an HR plan to begin rolling out in the new year.

### **Appointments Review Committee**

This committee will see a revival of work with our new Senior Manager, HR coming on board. Tons of issues to address around salary grade design and pay equity in general, but in particular as this relates to Workstudy positions. We have some student staff making north of \$20/hr while others are making close to minimum wage. Questions around the committee's role in an HR framework need to be answered too.



### **Fundraising & Sponsorship Committee**

This committee met earlier in the year and upon assessing our sponsorship situation, will continue to leave the task of sponsorship management to our Communications Manager given the efficiencies behind having a function with continuity take care of sponsor relationships.

### **Impacts Committee (Chair)**

Many sustainability-related initiatives have been planned and coordinated by Joyce Shen, our Sustainability Coordinator. In the interest of everyone's time on this committee, a lot more responsibility has been put on the Sustainability Coordinator this year for executing initiatives that in the past has been an operational function of the committee. We have however restarted regular bi-weekly committee meetings that serve as a discussion forum for different environmental groups on campus.

### **Finance Commission**

We continue to receive and review funding and loan applications as part of the day to day. The new Rezgo system is up and running, albeit in a trial form with limited user groups. Some functional customizations have been made and I am working on an educational platform to accompany the system moving forward.

### **Renovations Planning Group**

This committee has recently brought forth a proposal to create new club office spaces on the lower level, and has also examined the costing of new security camera systems. This proposal will come to Council following an updated Video Surveillance Policy coming from BOC. If you've read this report in time for the Nov. 18th council meeting, be the first to mention this paragraph during my executive remarks for a free lunch at the AMS. Say the word "Kingsmill" if you'd like a beverage with that free lunch.

### **SUB Renewal Committee**

My work with this committee continues to centre around coordination with the Alumni Centre project as well as the financing terms of our own building. This financing is very important, as it dictates what scale of a project we're able to undertake. The recent changes around the Underground Bus Terminal are also something that is being considered.

## External Committees

### **Walter Gage Memorial Fund**

This committee continues to meet quarterly to review applications for this generous source of student initiative funding.

### **Innovative Projects Fund Committee**

This joint University-AMS committee is currently deliberating on this year's IPF applications. Our decisions should be made public by the end of the term.

### **Alumni Association Board of Directors**

This is an exciting organization to work with, as they're just now climbing out of a complete strategic review, and are starting to see mechanisms put into place that are yielding amazing results. Definitive agreements around the Alumni Centre project are almost complete, and the search for a new Executive Director for the Alumni Association will be commencing in the coming weeks. There are also some changes coming from a recent governance review where in-camera sessions are pushed towards the beginning of an agenda, making more controversial issues come to the surface for everyone's benefit. Also, I have been attending meetings of the Student Alumni Relations Coordinator team. This is a new initiative to get student representatives from different campus groups involved in engaging their alumni. My hope is to design an alumni engagement function for the AMS to begin work under next year's executive.

### **CiTR Board of Directors**

A project now underway for CiTR is a FUNDrive campaign to raise money for upkeep of the station. Having launched recently, the campaign has already raised over \$6000 through many on-air activities.

### **Canadian Students' Horizons Group**

This national group is composed of the student unions of UBC, the University of Alberta, the University of Western Ontario, and Queen's University. Of significant news is the recent sale of Travel CUTS which was historically owned by CSHG and CFS-S. The national travel is under the new ownership of Merit Travel effective October 26, 2009. Fun fact: if we were to ever consider joining the CFS, we would have to first vote to resign our seats on CSHG, as the CSHG bylaws prevent us from being a part of both CSHG and the CFS.