

Letter for SFPIRG, advocating the preservation of its space at SFU

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I gained knowledge in the classroom. I gained that and more at SFPIRG.

I am a PhD student in the Department of English at the University of Toronto and had completed an Undergraduate degree in English and French at Simon Fraser University, 2011-2015. I persevere and thrive in the research, teaching, and service aspects of this current degree by practicing mentorship, care, and inclusivity that are subtended by the insistence upon anti-oppressive, social and environmental justice. These are the values that SFPIRG not only clarified for me, but helped me cultivate in practical, lived ways, where the values shake away from their theoretical and abstract shell, and actively generate relations with others and with the world. It is with this background that I study Black Canadian and Indigenous literatures and have learnt to do so with a respect and understanding of their respective epistemological realities. SFPIRG laid the foundations for me to practice ethical scholarship that is being supported by federal funding agencies.

SFPIRG also gave me “more,” a vague qualitative term that captures exactly my inability to express its influence on my life. It is close to a kind of ineffable love and support I found there and learned to give. The trusted staff at SFPIRG are some of the most hardworking and intelligent people I have ever met. I still rely on them to think through complex issues around experiences of race, gender, ableness, class, and decolonization in this country. They committedly and uncompromisingly mentor many more students like me, allowing us to carry parts of them with us wherever we go. I took a lot from SFPIRG, but I also gave a lot to the SFU community through SFPIRG, its resources, and through my role as a member of the Board of Directors with other passionate students. We organized a rally to support the anti-pipeline protests at Burnaby Mountain in Fall 2013 that had some of the SFU faculty embroiled in legal suits. We supported these faculty and did our best to centre environmental justice and the Indigenous leadership at the protest camp. It was also during this time that I learned the lived experience of decolonial politics and how to concretely support Indigenous communities. SFU has committed \$9 million to promoting and adopting the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation report. These initiatives would only be emboldened by projects at SFPIRG. There needs to be a serious effort to sustain a vibrant, multi-faceted, and open space for communities to engage these various yet urgent issues, and SFPIRG has long been a strong voice in promoting justice, practicing decolonization, and holding other on-campus communities accountable. We cannot lose such a force for good.

Furthermore, community organizations like SFPIRG provide the space of refuge, safety, comfort to those in society who are marginalized and disempowered. In the current political climate and its hypervisible politics of hate, to allow the ongoing erasure of these spaces is tantamount to further exposing vulnerable communities to **violence and injustice**. Like the Women’s Centre and Out on Campus, SFPIRG is trusted by SFU undergraduate and graduate students to support them in difficult times when other campus resources or departments fall short on their commitments. We know institutions and the education system are not perfect, so why pretend like these organizations are tangential to student life? These organizations attempt their best to help students navigate the institution and the world.

If we want to believe that the university produces ethical and responsible persons, we need to also believe in the on-campus communities that make that possible. Academic spaces need to be

in collaboration with social-justice-centric organizations that present different, creative, and alternative approaches to making a better world and to surviving in one that is not there yet. **Maybe that is what I meant by the “more” that I gained. It is the making of a better world and the resilience required to get to it.**

To those in power who can preserve SFPIRG's space on campus: **I urge you to take the necessary action required to sustain a place of generosity, empowering community, and radical love. The disappearance of SFPIRG would mean the loss of a strong community and would signal not only SFU's disavowal of its students' support systems, but also its apathy toward social change and collective resilience.**

To SFPIRG: thank you for all that you taught me, gave me, and allowed me to give to you. You're with me always.