

An open letter from the Collective of Out on Campus to the student body (*text in italics indicates revisions made on Wednesday, March 10th, and Thursday, March 11th, 2010*) :

The 1 March edition of the Peak included an article detailing the debate over continued financial support of the Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group (SFPIRG). The Out On Campus (OOC) Collective wishes to respond to this debate with a show of unequivocal support for SFPIRG. Like OOC, SFPIRG provides a voice for student activism and advocacy as well as an opportunity for students to get involved with social issues. In addition, SFPIRG provides voices in support of environmental causes. As long-established student groups, we both contribute to the reputation of SFU as a socially active and aware institution. At a time when our school's finances are threatened, it is important to continue to fund these groups because without us SFU loses a part of its identity which is a draw for prospective students.

SFSS board members, Treasurer Joe Zelezny, and External Relations Officer Alysia MacGrotty along with fourth-year history student Jonathon Van Maren raised issues concerning the percentage of the student body who access SFPIRG, the usefulness of the services provided, and the *supposedly undemocratic* decision-making process of SFPIRG's Annual General Meeting. *SFPIRG agreed to employ Robert's Rules at their AGM, which is an intricate method of running meetings often used by the SFSS board. SFPIRG, like OOC and the Women's Centre, operates on a consensus-style procedure involving open discussion amongst attendees. The consensus process encourages all participants to voice their concerns. Reaching an agreement amongst all parties allows this group to move forward in a manner that best represents all of its members, making it an incredibly democratic process.* SFPIRG also offers consensus education workshops to enable other campus groups to benefit from this collaborative process.

The issues of use and usefulness of and by the student body can be addressed by drawing parallels to the many other student groups on campus which are funded by the SFSS *or whose levies are collected on their behalf by SFU and simply transferred through the SFSS.* *Worth noting is that unlike OOC and the Women's centre, SFPIRG, CJSF and the PEAK are NOT subsidized by SFSS and have no official affiliations with the SFSS. They are each subsidized by their own autonomous levy collected by SFU and are separate non-profit organizations.* From departmental student unions and student-run clubs, to SFSS services such as the Copy Centre, the Women's Centre, and the Highland Pub it can easily be seen that not all students access all groups. This does not change the fact that these groups and services are vital to campus life. The availability of these groups guarantees a safe space for students and access to resources not necessarily available in the SFU Library. They provide a breath of fresh air in contrast to the "concrete" experience that is the Burnaby campus. Would SFSS withdraw funding from the Pub because non-drinkers do not make use of the space? Or because they charge full price for alcohol, and therefore do not need subsidization? Would they have SFU *cease collecting levies for the Peak* because not every student reads it? Or CJSF because it does not reach the ears of all the student body?

No. They would not. And they have not. So, why focus on SFPIRG? If we don't provide spaces on campus for social and global justice, we risk long-term social and political repercussions, not to mention being subsumed by a more conservative atmosphere and these concrete walls will eventually become the prison they resemble.