



Fact Finding Report: Commerce Undergraduate Society (CUS) FROSH CHANTS

Following reports in the *Ubysey* and confirmed by the CUS Executive to the Dean of the Sauder School of Business that inappropriate chants occurred during the 2013 CUS FROSH events, a fact-finding team was established by the Vice President Students and the Dean of the Sauder School of Business to gather information and report on what occurred during the planning, training of leaders, and events associated with FROSH. The fact-finding process was not part of the UBC Non-Academic Misconduct process. However the information obtained in the fact-finding process may be relied upon as the basis for referring students to the UBC Non-Academic Misconduct process. This was made clear to all students at the beginning of each interview.

Fact-Finding Process

As a first step in the process, the four member fact-finding team examined a large amount of background materials pertaining to the planning and delivery of FROSH. An invitation was made to all current first-year students in the BCom program (that is, all potential FROSH participants) inviting them to meet with the team or make submissions via e-mail. All senior CUS leaders and at least one CUS leader from each FROSH student group were interviewed. The team interviewed 62 students and 4 staff members over three days. The team split into two panels, to enable two sets of interviews to be conducted at the same time. Most interviews (but not all due to lack of availability) included attendance of an AMS Advocacy Office Representative.

What We Discovered

The key facts revealed through our investigation are summarized below, grouped into several topics. Quotes are included to clarify and provide specific examples of student statements.

FROSH Leadership

- FROSH leaders consistently identified that they wanted to replicate the experience and model the leadership provided during their first year FROSH experience because of the positive, enjoyable, and memorable experience it was for them. At FROSH they developed lasting friendships and a deep connection to the Sauder School of Business.
- The students who had a positive experience at FROSH felt compelled to become leaders and come back year after year to ensure a consistent experience that involves the same group activities and rituals.



- *“All FROSH leaders have been to FROSH and they try and recreate the same environment.”*
- Students involved in the hiring of FROSH leaders were looking for leadership, responsibility, and spirit, particularly “FROSH spirit” and enthusiasm for FROSH.
- A FROSH culture based on tradition and ritual has resulted from this cycle:
 - *“Because alumni have passed it along, it’s a tradition.”*
 - *“No one thought of the seriousness of this, it just kept on in Sauder being passed from year to year. You just followed the leader before you... It strings out and that becomes the culture.”*

The YOUNG Chant

- The YOUNG chant was used by the majority of FROSH leaders. This and other chants containing sexist and derogatory language (defined by leaders as the “bus cheers”) were chanted on the bus trips only.
- On the first bus trip, some leaders told the participants that, because bus cheers contained inappropriate language, they should only be used on the bus and should not be videotaped or posted on social media. FROSH leaders were leading the bus cheers, and by the end of the weekend some first-year students were leading the bus cheers.
- The majority of leaders interviewed stated that there was no cheer training that chants were passed on orally from year to year.
 - *“You learn the bus cheers when you attend FROSH and when you become a leader you teach the cheers.”*
 - *“[chants] are an unfortunate oral tradition that is passed down.”*
- Bus cheers were not mentioned at this year’s leaders’ retreat (training) but instructions have been given in the past at the leaders’ retreats to keep the bus cheers on the bus.
- Two students we spoke with who did not attend FROSH in their first year and who have had no involvement with FROSH were not familiar with chants and had not heard the YOUNG chant.
- The bus cheers including the YOUNG chant are not new to this year’s FROSH and alumni report that they have been a part of FROSH in the past.
- The bus cheers and specifically the YOUNG chant are not unique to UBC and are chanted at other universities. Other instances where students identified they had heard or participated in the YOUNG cheer were at a university in eastern Canada, during a regional undergraduate business competition, and by a high school sports team.
- Some leaders described the purpose of the bus cheers to take people out of their comfort zone and bring them together, and saw them as exclusive to Sauder.



- *“The bus cheers were taboo, a naughty thing that you got to do... a way to loosen up. It made you feel less apprehensive... it was our own thing... it allowed people to come out of their shell.”*
- *“[Bus cheers] are a thing for us only, a thing that only Sauder students know, a tradition, this helps build community.”*
- *“It’s a brotherhood type of thing, an inside thing, it’s inclusive in that others would not know about it.”*
- The YOUNG chant is a well-established tradition within the leader group.
 - *“[if the co-Chairs had told the leaders not to do the chants], I don’t think it would have stopped. The executive doesn’t monitor and this is an established tradition.”*
- Some leaders did not know what the purpose of the bus cheers was. They indicated they did not think about it, but just followed the tradition.
- A few leaders viewed the bus cheers as intentionally vulgar and not to be taken seriously.
 - *“Like a really bad offensive joke.”*
 - *“Trying to be shockingly funny.”*
 - *“Being as loud, obnoxious and raunchy as possible.”*
- On some level all the leaders understood these cheers were inappropriate and offensive and this is why they kept them on the bus. However, most leaders that we interviewed did not think about the meaning of the words or realize the harm they could cause until the chant was made public by the media.
 - A first year BCom student stated: *“I was hesitant to participate in [the YOUNG chant] but when a leader does it, it seems like a rite of passage.”*
 - A second year BCom student who emailed stated: *“The CUS FROSH organizers have a false impression that the cheers are ‘fun’.”*

Comfort Zones and Activities

- The majority of leaders felt that a critical aspect of FROSH is to push people outside their comfort zone through cheers, chants, and activities, which they believed built strong teams and bonds.
- First-year students indicated that a number of the FROSH activities were “overly sexualized”.
- It was reported that leaders and underage first-year students were drinking alcohol, some to excess.
- All leaders believed they were ensuring people felt included and comfortable at FROSH by regularly stating that if people felt uncomfortable they didn’t have to participate in cheers, chants, or activities and if uncomfortable they could speak to a leader.



- Upon reflection many leaders felt that students would come forward and speak with a leader if they were uncomfortable. However, an equal number did not think a first year student would be able to come forward with concerns within the environment of FROSH.
 - *“It’s tough to reflect, it makes me wonder, this idea of people can come forward if uncomfortable... there is no chance they would.”*
- No leader stated that a first-year student had come forward concerned about the bus cheers, but they indicated that some first-year students did opt out of some of the activities.
- It has been reported that some students opted to leave FROSH altogether, some as a result of feeling uncomfortable.
- While first-year students were not forced to chant bus cheers, hearing the cheers was unavoidable. Some first-year students reported that they were not forced to participate in any activity they were uncomfortable with, but by opting out and sitting on the sidelines they felt excluded.

Reflection

- Overwhelmingly we heard from leaders that upon reflection, and having people from outside FROSH speak to them on this matter, they realize just how negative and wrong the YOUNG chant is. Words like “embarrassed,” “ashamed,” “mortified,” and “disappointed” were regularly used to describe how they felt about not having identified the chants as being hurtful and not stopping them.
- Some leaders have suggested ways to be restorative. One leader reported that there’s talk among leaders of contributing to or starting a non-profit sexual assault support organization. Others have suggested a public apology is in order.
 - *“Leaders are not proud of their event being associated with condoning this behaviour and they are willing to take the necessary steps to ensure this doesn’t happen again. We’re willing to make a public apology.”*
- Everyone interviewed agreed that the YOUNG chant was wrong and should not continue to be part of FROSH. However, no one took the opportunity to reflect on other aspects of FROSH.
- We heard from many leaders that this incident was unfortunate because the YOUNG chant and bus cheers are such a small part of FROSH and that there are so many good things that FROSH does.
- We heard from the majority of leaders that they saw the negative fallout and subsequent reflection as a learning opportunity and hoped that something positive would come from it.
- Organizers of FROSH genuinely felt they had done training on equity, diversity, and physical safety. Upon reflection many organizers felt they had not given appropriate thought to emotional safety.



- *“We focused on the safety of scraped knees instead of the safety of other aspects from our words.”*

Discussion

The Statement of Principle in *the UBC Statement on Respectful Environment for Students, Faculty and Staff* reads:

“The best possible environment for working, learning and living is one in which respect, civility, diversity, opportunity and inclusion are valued. Everyone at the University of British Columbia is expected to conduct themselves in a manner that upholds these principles in all communications and interactions with fellow UBC community members and the public in all University related settings.”

Reflecting on what the FROSH organizers and leaders shared with the fact-finding team, the students believed they were providing a positive and memorable orientation experience that pushed first-year students outside their comfort zones and in doing so helped them bond with their classmates and build a strong affinity to the Sauder School of Business. Certainly, this is what they believed their own FROSH experience to have done when they participated as first-year students.

With a few exceptions, all the students we interviewed from the FROSH Organizing Committee and the FROSH leaders' group had attended FROSH when they were first-year students and had found the experience to be very positive and memorable. Time and again we heard leaders speak of looking up to and wanting to be like their own leaders from the past.

It is understandable how those first-year students who have had such a profound FROSH experience would be the same students who would apply to organize and lead the program in the years following. The organizers stated that FROSH leaders were selected based on leadership, responsibility, and spirit. It is evident that the “spirit” that the organizers sought in prospective leaders was an enthusiasm for the traditions and culture of FROSH. This sheds light on how group activities and the oral tradition of bus cheers could be passed down from year to year with little thought given to the negative impact they might have on many students.

It is easy to underestimate the impact that power and influence can play on a group of students who have participated in and led an orientation experience that they themselves have perceived to be overwhelmingly positive and memorable. This is not meant to release the organizers and leaders from their responsibility but it does provide insight into how these types of group activities and rituals, used for the purpose of pushing students



outside their comfort zones, continue year after year with little critical thought given to the impact of individual elements on the wellbeing of first-year students who participate.

In preparing training for the leaders on equity and responsibility, leadership, and first aid, the organizers did not draw on any expertise from within the University or the community. Instead, they prepared their own training based on what they felt would create an inclusive, safe, and welcoming environment for all first-year students. The training was very brief and superficial, only scratching the surface on these topics, and it did not prepare the leaders to consider the wellbeing of all first year students. Furthermore, the leaders were not challenged to think critically about how to create an orientation experience that would be congruent with the *UBC Statement on Respectful Environment for Students, Faculty, and Staff*.

With the media attention that the bus cheers have received, the organizers and leaders we met with have reflected on the use of the bus cheers, including in particular the YOUNG cheer. Though they say it was not their intent, we believe that they do now understand the negative impact that the cheers may have on individuals and how they could be seen as furthering a culture that endorses sexual assault. The organizers and leaders were genuinely remorseful, embarrassed, and ashamed that they allowed a tradition to go on that may have had a negative impact on students and that went against what they believe FROSH stands for: creating a positive, inclusive and memorable orientation experience. It is worth noting that through the course of the interviews, no student took the opportunity to reflect on other aspects of the FROSH program, such as the group activities that were seen by many first year-students to be overly sexualized, to consider how they may exclude and make first-year students feel uncomfortable. All the leaders were too focused on the bus cheers and in particular the YOUNG cheer; they truly believed that if that particular cheer was removed then the other elements of FROSH would be a positive experience.

As the Fact-Finding Team reflects on what has been learned through this process, we believe there is an opportunity for the University to revisit how we educationally support and work with the Alma Mater Society and the Undergraduate Constituencies on the development, planning, and delivery of orientation programs, to ensure that everybody involved understands what it really means to provide an inclusive, safe, and welcoming orientation experience for all students. To do so, requires congruence with the UBC Statement on Respectful Environment for Students, Faculty, and Staff.