

STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION OF MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY

# ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22





# A MESSAGE TO OUR MEMBERS

The 2021-22 school year began with the hope of a return to normalcy. With the majority of classes returning to in-person delivery, the campus felt lively again — bustling with students, faculty, and staff. Along with these changes though, SAMRU heard from many members who felt anxious and uncertain about navigating their time at university amid pandemic waves and related restrictions.

In response, SAMRU focused on ensuring our members were informed and connected — through engaging online and in-person activities and events, direct monthly email communications, a massive member check-in survey, town hall meetings, volunteer opportunities, events, and much more. This member engagement guided SAMRU in the work of adapting its services and advocacy to the unique circumstances of the year.

To ensure members had an opportunity to express themselves directly, SAMRU held a live-streamed town hall early in the fall semester to hear and respond to members' questions and concerns. With this information SAMRU continued advocating to MRU's administration and faculty for students' best interests to be central to pandemic decision-making. As a result of SAMRU's advocacy, MRU extended the fee and drop-date deadlines and continued the end-of-classes withdrawal deadline.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 cases increased throughout the fall and forced winter classes to begin online in the new year.

In addition, members also faced the possibility of a faculty strike at MRU. During the faculty bargaining process SAMRU remained in close communication with senior University and faculty officials for updates, and urged them to find common ground in recognition of student struggles given the pandemic, course delivery changes, and tuition increases, among other things.

During this difficult time, SAMRU worked to keep members updated regularly, posted a strike FAQ online, and held a virtual town hall on the topic that collected over 800 questions and concerns from members. In the end, the Mount Royal Faculty Association said SAMRU's statements about cutbacks in post-secondary education funding drew attention to the need for more flexibility in bargaining, helping bring a resolution.

Throughout this year of uncertainty, SAMRU continued to focus on what was important: providing the best services and representation possible by connecting with, listening to, advocating for, and engaging our members, the students of MRU, to help them succeed.

## CHECKING IN WITH MEMBERS

SAMRU formally gathers feedback from all members twice a year through surveys. The Fall Member Check-In survey, which had over 1000 responses, explored member experiences and life challenges and asked members to rate organizational priorities. Of these priorities, members rated support services the highest. Given the pandemic context of this survey year, topics like safety concerns, isolation due to online classes, uncertainty over class formats, and other related concerns featured in survey responses.

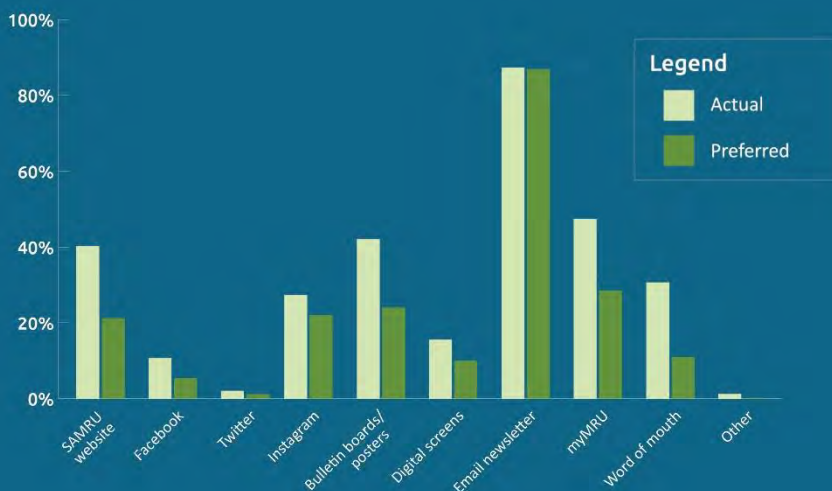
*"I love that SAMRU offers a variety of services for students in need. It is a prime example of the empathy and care SAMRU puts into supporting students." — 2022 Student Satisfaction and Awareness Survey*

The Student Satisfaction and Awareness Survey conducted in the Winter semester had 690 responses and asked members to reflect on their experiences with SAMRU and its offerings. This survey has been conducted each year since 2014 with the exception of 2021 when it was temporarily suspended because of pandemic-related closures.

In the survey this year, Support Services received the highest member satisfaction ranking at 81.2% reinforcing the importance of ensuring these services remain available to students. Overall, members' satisfaction averaged across all SAMRU areas increased 3.6% from 2020.

*"Having SAMRU really helps me, their emails let me know things about Mount Royal that I wouldn't have known otherwise. It also helps me get involved as a student here at Mount Royal." —Member Check-in Survey*

### Students' Preferred Communication Methods



# 74%

AVERAGE OPENING RATE

(compared to an average open rate for all industries of 21.33% or 39% for nonprofits and educational institutions)

The email newsletter is not only the most effective method of communication, it is the preferred method.



2021-22 Student Governing Board (SGB) from left to right: Taylor Amy, Andrea Barlaan, Michaela Butt, Tristalyn GiVogue, Michelle Gladue, Leah Hart, Erin Hepburn, Christian Kindrachuck, Avery McLellan, Sophie Piche, Nic Savage, Arooba Siddiqui, Nancy Tran, Ashley Hjorth (Speaker)

## GOVERNANCE

The [Student Governing Board](#) is the elected student body responsible for all elements of the Students' Association's business and affairs, including student representation, and is the official channel of communication between the students and MRU.

### Communicating with Members

To keep SAMRU's members informed and involved in the important work of the Student Governing Board, the Board created monthly highlight videos throughout the year. These short update videos were posted on SAMRU's website and social media and feature Board members showcasing the Board's work and decisions.

*"SAMRU has been excellent in keeping me up to date on what's happening on campus and what their work is doing for us as students. SAMRU has put together great events and been a great representative body since I've been at MRU. This is not my first university experience (my third, in fact), but this is the first time the student association has been a part of my experience."*

— Member Check-in Survey



## Organizational Policy Updates

In 2021-22 the Board continued updating and improving SAMRU's organizational policies, including:

- SAMRU's Investment Policy
- The Strategic Planning Policy
- And SAMRU's Research Integrity & Ethics Policy

## SAMRU's Journey Towards Reconciliation

In a continuing effort to promote truth and reconciliation through education and understanding, SAMRU personnel took part in the KAIROS blanket exercises led by MRU's Iniskim Centre. The program was developed collaboratively by Indigenous elders, knowledge-keepers, and educators.

Participants learned some important historical context and then took part in an interactive and absorbing exercise that helped them imagine the experiences of Indigenous Peoples of Canada over the last 500 years. After the session, many participants said they were deeply moved and were grateful to have been involved in such a powerful and meaningful exercise.

## REPRESENTATION

The Student Governing Board achieves its objectives for representation and communication with MRU, the government, and external student groups by hiring student employees and delegating authority for this work to them.

[Representation Executive Council](#) (REC) members are the student employees selected by members and hired by the Student Governing Board to carry out these important representation duties under the direction of the Board.

Whether in-person or online, SAMRU continued to advance the interests of its members to Mount Royal and the government. The Representation Executive Council had a particularly challenging advocacy year, requiring them to address rapidly changing issues related to hybrid class delivery, frequently evolving pandemic regulations, and a potential faculty strike.



Here are some representation initiatives from 2021-22:

### **COVID-19 Advocacy**

- ✓ Extended add/drop date for the fall semester
- ✓ Extended withdrawal deadline for fall and winter semester
- ✓ Reintroduced the COVID-19 pass/fail option for winter semester
- ✓ Partnered with Mount Royal Faculty Association (MRFA) to maintain masking mandates through the end of the winter semester

### **Sexual Violence Prevention Advocacy**

- ✓ Alberta Minister for Advanced Education announced funding and policy direction to tackle sexual violence on Alberta post-secondary campuses as a direct result of work SAMRU has done since 2018
- ✓ Advocated for implementation of recommendations from SAMRU's 2021 report on Dating, Domestic, and Sexual Violence on campus; a working group/task force is currently being developed with MRU

### **MRU/MRFA Contract Negotiations**

- ✓ Held virtual town hall to gather students' concerns about a potential class disruption should a strike take place
- ✓ Communicated student needs to both parties and helped reach a compromise (SAMRU played a role in avoiding a strike or lockout!)

### **New Learning Management System**

- ✓ Represented students' needs on committee tasked with updating MRU's existing learning management system (Blackboard); selected Desire2Learn (D2L)

### **Tuition Increases and Course Fees**

- ✓ Voted against increasing international and domestic tuition and fees for the 2022-23 school year on the MRU Board of Governors, citing mental health and rising debt levels as main reasons against

### **Municipal and Federal Elections**

- ✓ Ran a Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaign for the federal election in September 2021
- ✓ Ran a GOTV campaign for the Calgary municipal election in October 2021
- ✓ Hosted a virtual debate for Calgary Ward 8 candidates (MRU's riding)
- ✓ Set up a "vote anywhere" polling station in Wyckham House during the advance voting period, making it easier for students to vote while on campus

## Contributions to Provincial and Federal Student Advocacy

- ✓ REC's VP External was elected Chair of the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS), the provincial advocacy group of which SAMRU is a member
- ✓ REC's President was elected as Director of Policy for the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), the federal advocacy group of which SAMRU is a member

*"I appreciate how SAMRU has worked with the MRU faculty to extend the withdrawal date given the previous temporary campus closure. It's good to know that students' concerns are being heard and met." — Member Check-in Survey*



# SAMRU IN THE MEDIA

## MRU and faculty association reach agreement in principle in contract negotiations

"We're thrilled to hear that both parties were able to reach an agreement in principle... I'm pretty optimistic that the faculty association will ratify that agreement..."

## Alberta announces 2.5m boost for campus safety at post-secondary institutions

"It is the responsibility of every member of our community to take active steps to promote safe and healthy relationships."

## MRU students association pushes back against lifting mask mandates

"We do think that this is an equity, diversity and inclusion issue because of those students who are immunocompromised or who have family members who are, and who came to this school with the understanding that there were going to be these health protocols in place."

## MRU Students share their thoughts on the Civic Election

"We need to talk about politics in full sentences. Politics and the policies that drive politics are so much bigger than you can fit in a 240-character tweet, and I think that with the shortened news sound bites that we get and the quick, immediate culture nowadays, it's really difficult to talk about the full picture of what the policies are that are being discussed."

## Mount Royal students can choose a COVID-19 pass or fail again this term

"That sense of having to go from, in-person to online, back to in-person again, that it's just been a really overwhelming semester. This is a way for students to be able to have an option if they don't feel that their letter grade will serve them well."

# MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

## New Website

SAMRU launched a new website in the fall of 2021 to provide a user-friendly platform for our members, the MRU community, and external stakeholders. The custom-designed website was created to provide an engaging user experience and is fully mobile responsive. A rental website showcasing the value and versatility of SAMRU's available rental spaces was also added.

In advance of the website changes, a number of focus groups were held to determine what our members needed and expected of SAMRU's website.

Students in the focus group reported that the existing SAMRU website was bright, colourful, animated, and inviting; features that we should transfer when creating the new site.

The focus group reported the primary reasons for accessing SAMRU's website are:



TO FIND  
**CLUBS  
INFORMATION**



TO FIND  
**VOLUNTEER  
AND/OR JOB  
OPPORTUNITIES**



TO FIND  
**STUDENT HEALTH  
& DENTAL PLAN  
INFORMATION**



## Wyckham House Aesthetics

In 2021, SAMRU also focused on improving the physical appearance of Wyckham House to create an even more welcoming space for students and build on our members' sense of pride in their student centre.

A number of spaces in Wyckham House were refreshed and updated to provide clear wayfinding, denote important spaces like Council Chambers, reflect and celebrate the important work done in a number of service centres, and communicate the many services, programs, and opportunities SAMRU provides.

The space outside Council Chambers saw the biggest transformation, showcasing SAMRU's Student Governing Board members, visually illustrating SAMRU's lengthy and storied history, and displaying the SAMRU logo with pride.



## West Gate Social (WGS) Reopens

[West Gate Social](#), SAMRU's student lounge, reopened to the campus community in September 2021 returning to deliver extraordinary value to SAMRU's members and their guests. Due to continuing pandemic restrictions, food service was not yet reintroduced, however guests were encouraged to visit SAMRU's food court and bring their food into the lounge to enjoy with a beverage.

In order to continue to serve the campus community in the midst of gathering restrictions, WGS was required to implement the Alberta Restrictions Exemption Program (REP) and verify vaccination status upon entry. This program was phased out in February 2022 when the provincial government updated its public health orders.

In June of 2022, West Gate Social was again certified under the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission's Best Bar None program, recognizing establishments that meet a stringent set of criteria for patron safety and responsible service.

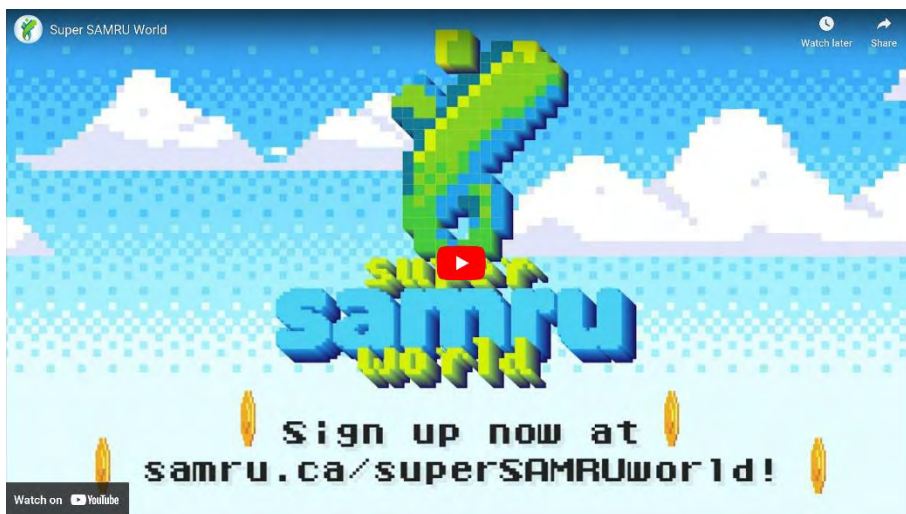
*"West Gate Social has been a great and affordable place for me to go to. The environment is very inviting and positive as well." — Member Check-in Survey*

## Hybrid New Student Orientation: Super SAMRU World

In the fall of 2021 SAMRU took an innovative approach to New Student Orientation. Members were invited to “level up” their knowledge of SAMRU by competing in online and in-person challenges, completing surveys, and visiting our spaces to win prizes — including a grand prize of \$1,000 cash.

Designed to emulate a popular 8-bit video game and using a digital passport, “Super SAMRU World” ran over six weeks, introducing members to the main services and program areas of the organization. Over 740 students competed and the program was well-received.

*“It is unbelievable everything SAMRU does for students, what a sense of community!!” — Super SAMRU World user*



## Performance for Peace

A student initiative, Performance for Peace took place in late March 2022 on the Wyckham House main stage to support students feeling fear and uncertainty surrounding world conflicts.

Students of all faiths and backgrounds were invited to help foster a sense of community, promote peaceful and compassionate practice, find connection during difficult times, and create a space to support others affected by the ongoing conflicts. Several great performers took to the stage for this event as attendees reflected on the need for peace around the globe.

## Sex Toy Bingo: Building Healthy Relationships

One of SAMRU’s most popular events, Sex Toy Bingo aims to create an atmosphere of fun, judgment-free exploration of sexuality, consent, and healthy relationships. This year, in addition to the Bingo games and prizes, performances from shibari artists and dancers were introduced to help students better understand the broad spectrum of expressions of sexuality.

*“I love the events that are put on by SAMRU members and clubs. It brings the school together during tough times and makes things fun.” — Member Check-in Survey*

## SAMRU Awards

For over 60 years [SAMRU Awards](#) has been recognizing students who have inspired and enhanced the lives of their fellow Mount Royal students. SAMRU was proud to present students with awards such as the Inspiring Culture Award, Citizenship Award, and Committed Learner Award, among others, with awards totalling over \$40,000.

Due to the pandemic, the 2022 SAMRU Awards were held virtually for a second year and featured a theme based on the sitcom *The Office*. This special edition of the SAMRU Awards was termed “the Sammies”, and SAMRU got some help in the form of cameos from the hit show’s cast: actors Kate Flannery, Oscar Nunez, Brian Baumgartner, and Leslie David Baker congratulated recipients on their awards.



## Clubs

[SAMRU-ratified clubs](#) experienced a particularly challenging year due to gathering restrictions as a result of the pandemic. Indoor gatherings were limited to no more than 10 individuals except in venues that participated in the Alberta Restrictions Exemption Program, like West Gate Social. This meant clubs could largely only hold events in commercial locations, making planning and implementing club events and programs more difficult.

SAMRU worked closely with clubs to ensure their activities met current health restrictions while also providing options and support including making West Gate Social available for club events as often as possible.

*"SAMRU has helped me overcome the fear and anxiety that I won't be able to fit in and make any friends with the help of clubs." — Member Check-in Survey*



**57**  
FULLY-RATIFIED CLUBS



**52**  
APPROVED VIRTUAL  
ACTIVITIES



**64**  
APPROVED IN-  
PERSON ACTIVITIES

## Volunteers

SAMRU would not be able to serve our members without the generous support of our volunteers. To support students who are interested in volunteering, SAMRU categorizes its volunteer opportunities into three broad areas: Programs & Services, Governance, and Representation Committees. From there students can decide which areas interest them most and find opportunities that best suit their interests. From sitting on a committee to helping to run an ongoing service or program, there's something for everyone.



**133**  
VOLUNTEERS



**1,749**  
HOURS VOLUNTEERED

## WUSC Student Refugee Program (SRP)

The World University Service of Canada's (WUSC's) Student Refugee Program (SRP) has empowered over 1,800 young refugees from 39 countries to continue their education in safe and supportive environments in Canada. Through local committees, WUSC works to sponsor and resettle refugee students at institutions across Canada.

In 2021-22, SAMRU's Local Committee, in partnership with the University, welcomed its very first student refugee to campus. The student committee members, supported by SAMRU and MRU staff, faced the challenge of not only providing transition, academic and social support for the student refugee, but also did so under frequently changing pandemic restrictions. Despite these challenges, the program was a success and the student thrived academically and was well supported through their integration into Canadian culture.

## SERVICES BY THE NUMBERS:

### Food Financial Support

Delivered via the [Peer Support Centre](#)



**2929**  
students that accessed  
Free Breakfast



**672**  
students that accessed the  
Food & Hygiene Cupboard



**45**  
emergency student loans  
disbursed



**17**  
emergency student bursaries  
disbursed



**595**  
food donations received



**32**  
students referred to the  
Calgary Food Bank

*"I appreciate the free breakfast and pantry with essential supplies and food. This makes me feel much better about having my basic needs met if I am struggling. I like that there are cultural events too. My university experience has been greatly improved by SAMRU." — Member Check-in Survey*

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FUNDS (ELF)

As a component of SAMRU's scholarship fund, the [Experiential Learning Fund](#) (ELF) is available to help eligible students take advantage of unique learning and growth opportunities outside their experience at MRU.



**68**  
ELF applications  
awarded



**\$40,617**  
awarded to ELF applicants

## SAMRU TAX CLINIC

SAMRU's [free tax-filing service](#) with trained volunteers to serve eligible students



**101**  
clients served



**118**  
tax returns filed



**63**  
new clients



**38**  
returning clients



**13**  
volunteers completing  
tax returns

## FUNDRAISING & SPONSORSHIPS

### MRU donates \$1000 to SAMRU's Peer Support Centre Food & Hygiene Cupboard and MacEwan University's Food Bank

In a friendly wager over the Battle of Alberta between the Edmonton Oilers and the Calgary Flames, both Mount Royal and MacEwan University in Edmonton pledged \$1,000 to the losing team's campus food bank in an effort to combat food insecurity — in addition to raising the winning team's flag on campus.

In the end, the Flames lost the series, and as such, MRU made a generous donation of \$1,000 to MacEwan's food bank while also making a \$1,000 donation to SAMRU's Peer Support Centre's food and hygiene cupboard.

SAMRU relies on donations and fundraised dollars to supplement its programs and services. If you wish to donate to SAMRU your money will go to helping provide the many programs we offer our students. Or you can let us know where you'd like to help out and we can direct your donations accordingly.

[DONATE NOW](#)



## FINANCIALS

[AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS](#)

[PREVIOUS ANNUAL REPORTS](#)

The Students' Association of Mount Royal University (SAMRU) represents and serves Mount Royal University students to help them succeed.

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