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Student union salaries across Canada

And where the money comes from.

By Jack Hauen, Hamza Tariq, Alex McKeen and Peter Siemens

Over the past few months, *The Ubyyssey* led an investigation in partnership with Western University's [Gazette](#) and the University of Toronto's [Varsity](#) to determine student union executive salaries at 16 major Canadian universities.

This article details not only how much executives at different schools are paid, but their varying responsibilities and the sizes of the student populations they represent — and where that money comes from in the first place.

School	Exec. salary	Undergrad pop.	# of execs	Total exec. salary	Cost per student
University of Waterloo Federation of Students (FEDS)	\$46,532.00	29,912	4	\$186,128.00	\$6.22
Western University Students' Council (USC)	\$44,632.52	30,000	5	\$219,550.79	\$7.32
University of Calgary Students' Union (UCSU)	\$38,481.00	24,387	5	\$192,405.00	\$7.89
University of Manitoba Students' Union (UMSU)	\$37,700.00	24,723	5	\$188,500.00	\$7.62

University of Alberta Students' Union (UASU)	\$36,811.00	31,161	6	\$184,055.00	\$5.91
McMaster University Students' Union (MSU)	\$36,247.00	22,558	4	\$154,246.00	\$6.84
Ryerson University Students' Union (RSU)	\$36,000.00	33,834	5	\$180,000.00	\$5.32
University of Saskatchewan Students' Union (USSU)	\$35,747.31	16,871	4	\$142,989.24	\$8.48
York University Federation of Students (YFS)	\$33,700.00	46,400	5	\$168,500.00	\$3.63
Students' Federation of the University of Ottawa (SFUO)	\$33,400.00	30,137	6	\$200,400.00	\$6.65
University of British Columbia Alma Mater Society (AMS)	\$32,500.00	42,986	5	\$162,500.00	\$3.78
Queen's University Alma Mater Society (AMS)	\$31,000.00	17,413	3	\$93,000.00	\$5.34
University of Toronto University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU)	\$30,060.92	57,670	7	\$210,426.44	\$3.65
Concordia Student Union (CSU)	\$29,367.98	23,965	8	\$234,943.84	\$9.80
Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU)	\$28,798.00	27,075	7	\$201,586.00	\$7.45
University of Victoria Students' Society (UVSS)	\$28,556.00	17,407	5	\$142,780.00	\$8.20

University of Victoria Students' Society (UVSS)

- **Executive roles (five):** Director of Outreach and University Relations; Director of Campaigns and Community Relations; Director of Student Affairs; Director of Finance and Operations; Director of Events
- **Salary (each):** \$28,556

- **Work week:** 35 hours
- **Undergraduate student population:** 17,407 (2014)
- **Financial statements:** [Here](#)
- **Benefits/perks:** Health and dental coverage; 50 per cent of child care costs covered.

In 2015, the UVSS collected \$2,742,411 in membership fees. Each full-time student at the university pays \$26.60 per year for "day to day operations" of the UVSS, which includes executive salaries. All told, the union exited 2015 with a deficit of almost \$420,000.

University of British Columbia Alma Mater Society (AMS)

- **Executive roles (five):** President; VP Academic and University Affairs; VP Finance; VP Administration; VP External Affairs
- **Salary (each):** \$32,500
- **Work week:** 40 hours
- **Undergraduate student population:** 42,986
- **Budget:** [Here](#)
- **Benefits/perks:** Yearly \$1,000 in health and wellness benefits; daily 50 per cent food discount at AMS-run outlets on business days; yearly \$1,500-\$3,000 business [travel](#) budget; one-time \$1,000-\$1,200 honorarium for transitioning new execs into their role; monthly \$60 phone bill reimbursement.

The executives at UBC's Alma Mater Society (AMS) are paid \$32,500 and are each responsible for portfolios valued between \$77,000 and \$140,000.

In recent years, the exec salary was \$27,500, and included a Performance Accountability Incentive of up to \$5,000 for the completion of campaign goals. The amounts awarded were often not reported, which led to [frustration](#) about the union's transparency. Recently, PAI was lumped in with the base salary as Council [dissolved the committee](#) responsible for overseeing the distribution of the bonus.

Together, the exec salaries add up to \$162,500, or eight per cent of the AMS's total expenditures. The AMS collected [\\$18,413,946](#) — or \$428 per undergrad — in student

fees in 2015/16. The majority of that total is passed on to clubs and student initiatives, while \$45 per student per year [goes to the AMS](#) itself, including executive salaries.

The AMS lost \$193,000 in the operation of their businesses (the Pit, Pie R Squared, etc.) due to administration costs in 2015. They also operate events like Block Party as a student service, not a money-making venture. It [lost \\$207,295](#) in 2015, and is budgeted to be in the red by \$62,000 this year.

After allocations to student government, student services and programs and publications, the AMS came out of 2016 with a \$252,383 surplus overall.

As with most student unions, the mandated hours per week do not reflect what many execs feel the job actually requires.

“When you really look at the number of hours you work per week and what the income is, it's like \$10 an hour. You do it not for the money, but because you care about what needs to happen,” said AMS President Ava Nasiri.

University of Calgary Students' Union (UCSU)

- **Executive roles (five):** President; VP Academic; VP Operations/Finance; VP Student Life; VP External
- **Salary (each):** \$38,481
- **Work week:** 35 hours
- **Undergraduate student population:** 24,387
- **Budget/financial statements:** [Here](#)

Since the University of Calgary Student Union (UCSU) executive pay of \$38,481 is indexed to inflation, it's realistically closer to \$39,000, according to President Stephen Guscott.

The union takes pride in financing itself in large part from the businesses it runs, concerts and booking fees. Last year, they were in the black by \$1,589,475 in that area. They also collected \$5,269,577 in student fees in 2015 — about \$216 per undergraduate student. Sixty-five dollars of that \$216 goes directly to maintaining the student union, including executive salaries.

The union decided how much it would pay its executives by comparing student union exec salaries across Canada, then surveying the wages of the average Albertan aged 20-24 with less than an undergraduate degree.

“That roughly \$39,000 ended up being about 13 per cent higher than the average Albertan without a university degree. So it's pretty on par,” said Guscott.

“The students elect us to these positions to represent them and to act in their best interests, and really, the compensation is for taking on that responsibility and making those tough decisions — because at times, there's some pretty heavy choices that we have to make.”

Guscott also noted the addition of around a year onto any executive's degree — an accepted price to pay for a year of valuable work experience.

In addition to execs, the union pays its non-exec council members a monthly honorarium — \$110 per month during the summer and \$320 per month during the school year.

University of Alberta Students' Union (UASU)

- **Executive roles (six):** President; VP Academic; VP Operations/Finance; VP Student Life; VP External; Board of Governors Representative (unpaid)
- **Salary (each):** \$36,811
- **Work week:** 40 hours
- **Undergraduate student population:** 31,161
- **Budget:** [Here](#)

University of Alberta Student Union (UASU) executive salaries are also indexed to Alberta CPI and inflation. They handle portfolios valued in the mid-\$40,000 range.

According to their [2015 financial statements](#), the UASU collected \$9,935,376 in student fees — or \$319 per student — and made \$8,543,078 in other revenues, including business activities and programming and event activities. Of that \$319, full-time students each pay \$42.73 per year toward the student union itself.

In their 2015/16 budget, they lost \$95,684 on entertainment and events, but made \$322,977 from their businesses, with every retail and food service outlet except Undergrind in the black. Their other major cash cow is the Myer Horowitz Theatre, which collected \$79,540 in profit.

President Fahim Rahman detailed similar concerns to other Canadian student union executives about the number of hours he works per week on paper versus in reality — usually around 50 or 60, he says.

“It's not exactly healthy, but that's the reality of being here for only one year and having only so much time to get all of your platform promises achieved for students,” he said.

Rahman believes his compensation is fair, based on the amount of responsibility that rests on execs' shoulders.

“We are the stewards of a \$10 million organization ... and we're responsible for making sure that the students union's always pursuing projects that are relevant to students,” he said.

He also touched on the long-term benefits of holding an executive role at a major university. “The job is definitely professional development for anybody who steps into a role like this and there are just some experiences that you can't really be putting a price tag on. That's why I'm quite comfortable with what our salaries are at right now.”

University of Saskatchewan Students' Union (USSU)

- **Executive roles (four):** President; VP Academic Affairs; VP Operations and Finance; VP Student Affairs
- **Salary (each):** \$35,747.31
- **Work week:** 39.5 hours
- **Undergraduate student population:** 16,871
- **Budget/financial statements:** [Here](#)
- **Benefits:** Monthly cell phone reimbursement

The University of Saskatchewan Student Union (USSU) collected \$1,223,459 in student fees in 2015/16 — \$72 per student — and made \$343,562 in facility rental fees. They lost

\$93,471 running Louis', their signature pub. All told, the USSU exited 2015 with a \$103,717 surplus. Full-time undergraduates each pay \$79.08 per year toward the union itself.

Since the USSU only employs four executives, the distribution of responsibilities is slightly more skewed toward the top. In addition to the normal student union duties, the president also sits on the University of Saskatchewan's Board of Governors (BoG) and is responsible for lobbying the provincial and federal governments for student interests. These duties are taken on by BoG reps and the VP external in unions like UBC's AMS.

Does President Kehan Fu believe his salary is justified? It depends on how you look at it.

"It's easy to see how hard your job is when you compare it to everyone else who's working in the same field. In comparison to another student leader, you understand what the job means and the requirements, and you could probably rationalize getting paid \$50,000 a year, maybe \$60,000.

"In comparison to anything else in terms of careers, it definitely could use more questions. Should people be in a position in leadership where they're getting paid \$35,000 and they have no experience in government, no experience in management? I don't know," he said.

Fu also has concerns about the nature of student elections. Student apathy means low voter turnout — around 24 per cent at the U of S last year — and that, combined with the relative inexperience of any elected student leader, raises questions about the competency of those handling millions of dollars in student money.

"The election doesn't prepare people running for it. Nobody understands exactly what you're getting into. So in some ways, is it a reflection of how much they're getting paid, or is it a reflection of the fact that you have a process that might not have inherently selected the best people for the job?" he said.

Fu believes the reliance on certain voting blocs at some universities further complicates matters.

"I don't want to step on anybody's toes, but ... I'd say most prairie schools are a lot more ... service-driven, not politics or idea-driven or partisan-driven," he said. "For our students, they want a U-Pass, they wanted childcare, they want x, y and z service, they got it. It's not about anything else. You don't have to wave a flag, you don't have to wave a banner — just, 'Get it done and we'll vote.'

“I think at UBC, the fact that there's a frat is perhaps more partisan or organizational affiliation. It's a bloc, it's a community and you appeal to these blocs.”

Fu also touched on the importance of serving in a high-level position in university to long-term job prospects. “The funny part about these jobs is to even quantify the benefit to your resume. Like, it's not just \$35,000, right? That number is, I would say, deflated in terms of what it's worth.”

University of Manitoba Students' Union (UMSU)

- **Executive roles (five):** President; VP Advocacy; VP External; VP Internal; VP Student Services.
- **Salary (each):** \$37,700 including value of benefits
- **Work week:** 40 hours
- **Undergraduate student population:** 24,723
- **Budget/financial statements:** [Here](#) (detailed budget not online)

The University of Manitoba Student Union (UMSU) is planning to post their budget online soon, according to VP Internal Adam Pawlak, “with brief explanations of each budget line.”

We do know that full-time students pay \$465.39 in fees (minus health and dental plans) to the UMSU each year, according to their [Finances](#) page. Of that, \$54.70 goes to the union itself.

Tanjit Nagra, the union’s president, says she has spoken to other student leaders across the country and believes that UMSU execs are paid “decently well in comparison.”

“At the end of the day, we're serving students and our jobs are rewarding in that. It's a very unique opportunity and experience where a lot of people might do it for free, so definitely it's worth it,” she said.

Ryerson University Students' Union (RSU)

- **Executive roles (five):** President; VP Equity; VP Education; VP Operations; VP Student Life and Events

- **Salary (each):** \$36,000
- **Staff salaries:** \$15 per hour
- **Work week:** 40 hours
- **Student population (graduate and undergraduate):** More than 38,000
- **Benefits:** In addition to salaries, each executive is granted \$6,000 for "benefits," a \$1,000 transportation allowance and a \$1,000 expense account. The president is additionally allocated \$2,000 for "special projects."

As reported in [The Eyeopener](#), each RSU executive got a \$5,000 salary increase this year. Union staff are paid hourly and their rate of pay was increased by \$2.50 to \$15 per hour in this year's budget.

The RSU collects a levy totalling \$2 million from a student population of approximately 38,000. Neal Muthreja, this year's Vice-President Operations, spoke with *The Varsity* prior to the release of the 2016/17 budget. He said that RSU executives have significant capacity to impact change on the campus and that the direction of the union is shaped, "for the students and with the students."

Muthreja said that executives are paid based on a 40 hour work week, but that it is not uncommon for the people in these roles to put in up to 60 hours per week. When asked if he believed the rate of compensation for executives was fair he said, "When you break it down, maybe not so much. But the thing is that the satisfaction level that we get after we accomplish certain tasks for the students and when the students are really happy, that kind of compensates for all the things. It's all worth it at the end of the day."

University of Toronto University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU)

- **Executive roles (seven):** President; VP Internal and Services; VP University Affairs; VP External; VP Equity; VP Campus Life; VP Professional Faculties
- **Salaries:** \$25,000 each in 2005 dollars (approximately \$30,060.92 in real wages) except for Vice-President, Professional Faculties, who is paid \$10,000 in 2015 dollars.
- **Student population represented:** 57,670 (undergraduates at the downtown, Mississauga campuses)
- **Benefits:** \$70 phone allowance per month for executives

The UTSU is the largest students' union at U of T, representing all undergraduate students at the downtown Toronto and Mississauga campuses. It has been a member of the Canadian Federation of Students since 2003 — an association which has drawn the ire of some divisional student groups at the university in [recent years](#).

The UTSU collects a levy from its members that totals \$2,561,300 for the 2016/17 school year, according to the union's budget. Executive salaries are tied to a cost-of-living increase and are equivalent for each role, with the exception of the Vice-President Professional Faculties position, which is new this year.

The union has come under fire for issues of money management on [several occasions](#) in recent years. Putting together the funds for the much-anticipated Student Commons project has been a particular struggle for the union in recent years — one that current Vice-President, Internal and Services Mathias Memmel said was “a dumpster fire, but one that we're putting out.”

Robert Boissonneault of the UTSU was quick to add that the union has work to do to clean up its finances.

“We don't think the UTSU spends its money properly and are trying to change that,” said Boissonneault. “Basically, we'd like to say, on the record, that money is being misspent.”

York University Federation of Students (YFS)

- **Executive roles (five):** President; VP Campaigns; VP Operations; VP Equity; VP Campus Life
- **Executive member “stipends” (each):** \$33,700
- **Undergraduate student population:** 46,400

The executive of the federation consists of five members, all of whom were paid the same “stipend” of \$33,700 in 2015/16. The union levied \$1,869,640 from students in that year, meaning each student paid \$40.29.

The 2016/17 operating budget of the federation is not available online and, as of press time, YFS President Chenthoori Malankov did not respond to our requests for comment.

Western University Students' Council (USC)

- **Executive roles (salaries):** President (\$44,632.52); Vice-President (\$43,729.50); Secretary-treasurer (\$43,729.50); VP Student Events (\$43,729.77); Communications Officer (\$43,729.50)
- **Undergraduate population:** Close to 30,000
- **Work week:** 35 hours
- **Benefits:** Health, dental and eye care coverage up to \$6,000
- **Budget:** [Here](#)

The University Students' Council (USC) at Western is one of the largest student governments in Canada. The organization represents almost 30,000 undergraduate students on Western's main campus as well as the three affiliate colleges.

A recent restructuring of the executive portfolios has merged the two vice-president positions into one, bringing the total number of executives to five. The executives work longer than the calendar year of 12 months, with a transition month at the beginning of their terms to help facilitate the new executives in their roles.

The USC operates within a unionized environment and almost half of the full-time support staff are in unionized positions. In addition, the organization also offers a number of part-time positions to students and support staff.

“[The president] Eddy Avila is the CEO of a \$27 million organization and oversees over 55 full-time employees. Our salaries are based on our accountability and responsibility, and we believe they are reasonable for the amount of work that we do on students' behalf,” said Emily Ross, USC communications officer.

The USC runs businesses such as the Wave and Spoke [restaurants], the Purple Store, Creative Services and others. Whether these businesses break even, make a loss or profit varies from year-to-year. The USC also collects rent from external vendors operating in the University Community Centre.

The student fees collected are also used to pay for the undergraduate bus pass and health and dental plans.

Ross added that while the executives are paid for 35 hours each week, most of the time they end up working longer hours with on- and off-campus commitments.

“On busier weeks, as most weeks seem to be, we work closer around the 50-hour mark,” she said. “Higher if you include the time spent working away from the office as well as on-campus working, attending or hosting events, in meetings and supporting students.”

McMaster University Students' Union (MSU)

- **Executive roles (salaries):** President (\$36,247); VP Administration (\$39,333); VP Education (\$39,333); VP Finance (\$39,333)
- **Work week:** 40 hours.
- **Undergraduate population:** 22,558
- **Budget:** [Here](#)
- Student fee: \$515.38 per year

In contrast with most student governments across the country, the MSU president earns a smaller salary than the union’s vice-presidents, as the president gets free accommodation in campus residence while the vice-presidents pay for external housing, according to MSU VP Administration Shaarujaa Nadarajah.

While the executives end up working more than the 40 hours a week quota, Nadarajah thinks their salaries are fair compensation.

“I have always said no one does this job for the money,” she said. “I do think the compensation is reasonable looking at it through the confines of a student union structure.”

The MSU collects \$515.38 in supplementary fees from students of which \$124.33 go towards the union’s operating fee.

The rest of the fee breaks down into the bus pass, dental plan, health plan, the radio station (CFMU 93.3), the undergraduate student yearbook (Marmor) and the student refugee fee with \$138.65, \$118.90, \$109.95, \$12.80, \$9.22 and \$1.53 respectively.

Queen’s University Alma Mater Society (AMS)

- **Executive roles (three):** President; Vice-President, Operations; Vice-President, University Affairs.
- **Salary (each):** \$31,000
- **Undergraduate population:** 17,413 (2014)
- **Work week:** 40 hours
- **Budget:** [Here](#)

The Queen's University Alma Mater Society executives can take one class per semester, take time off from their degrees when in office and usually resume schooling after their terms end. With an operating budget of around \$15 million, AMS hires approximately 500 paid part-time and full-time staff.

The AMS divides its consolidated budget into three sections — services, government and other corporate. Major AMS services include the clothing store Tricolour Outlet, AMS Pub Services and the Common Ground Coffee House. At the end of the 2016 consolidated year in April, services saw a deficit of \$31,969, government saw a \$1 surplus and other corporate — which includes the AMS general office and the board of directors — had a \$19,019 surplus. The overall AMS 2015-16 consolidated budget had a \$12,949 deficit.

While questions may be raised if \$31,000 per year is sufficient pay for a year-long commitment with long working hours, AMS President Tyler Lively believes the experience is worth it especially if student leaders are passionate about their work.

“Nobody else gets this sort of management experience at our age. Nobody else gets to do this kind of advocacy work and gain the skills that we do at this age. I think that needs to be factored in when we talk about compensation,” he said.

University of Waterloo Federation of Students (FEDS)

- **Executive roles:** President; VP Education; VP Operations and Finance; VP Internal
- **Salaries (each):** \$46,532
- **Benefits package:** \$4,467
- **Undergraduates:** 29,912

- **Work week:** 35 hours
- **Budget/fee breakdown:** [Here](#)

The Federation of Students at the University of Waterloo is led by four executives — the president and four vice-president portfolios. Founded in 1967, it represents all undergraduate students at the university.

The FEDS divides its collected fees into two sections — the FEDS administered fee and the FEDS fee. The administered fee includes the bus pass, the health and dental plan and the student refugee program fee. The FEDS fee is what goes to the organization directly.

According to Chris Lolas, FEDS president, approximately \$3 million goes to the FEDS general fund, which covers everything except fees for the U-Pass, orientation and health and dental plans, which are collected and handled separately in the amounts of \$3.5 million, \$800,000, \$4.5 million and \$4 million, respectively.

In addition to their personal salaries, the three executives also have a part-time salary budget in their portfolios to pay support staff. In 2015/16, the president, vice-president, internal and vice-president, education had part-time salary allocations of \$3,000, \$3,900 and \$31,500, respectively.

In 2015/16, the FEDS posted a net surplus of \$6,157.53, with their only two sources of revenue being the collected student fees of \$2,825,510 and about \$13,000 generated from interest. The FEDS commercial services such as the Bombshelter Pub, Campus Bubble and the on-campus I-News store are all not funded through student fees.

While on paper the executives are paid for 35 hours per week, they often spend 50-60 hours working each week, Lolas said. In addition, while the FEDS executives are not limited in how many classes they make take during their terms, it's not common practice to take any

“It is rare that we do take a class and never more than one at a time. For example, in my six total terms as president, I have taken one class,” he said. “It never affects our job and we keep FEDS as our priority.”

Students' Federation of the University of Ottawa (SFUO)

- **Executive roles (six):** President; VP Finance; VP Services and Communications; VP University Affairs; VP Social; VP Equity
- **Salaries (each):** \$33,400
- **Undergraduate student population:** 37,080
- **Work week:** 40 hours
- **Budget:** [Here](#) (downloads .pptx file)

Students at the University of Ottawa pay \$95.57 in their fall term and \$91.95 in term two in fees directly to the student federation — a total of \$187.52, one of the highest in the country. That total doesn't include the nearly \$300 students pay yearly in student services fees.

The SFUO collected \$3,166,867 in student fees in 2015/16 and had a total operating revenue of \$19,094,095. Their expenses ran them \$20,498,579, though, meaning the union exited last academic year \$1,404,484 in the red.

VP Finance Rizy Rachiq calls it a "special financial situation," and notes that he is dealing with "a lot of complaints" due to budget cuts this year.

Despite the high fees, SFUO execs are paid close to the average of Canadian student executives. Rachiq believes his salary of \$33,400 is "not at all" high enough.

"We're [working] so many hours, [and have to deal with] the stress that comes with it. There are a lot of challenges that come every day and it doesn't come with the salary that would represent the risk or outcome of all of that," he said.

Rachiq notes that the workload would be too much for a full-time courseload, which means that executives usually have to tack on another year to their degrees.

"The argument of saying it prepares us or gives us opportunities I don't think is enough for having a low salary," he said.

Concordia Student Union (CSU)

- **Executive roles (eight):** General Coordinator; Finance Coordinator; Academic and Advocacy Coordinator; Loyola Coordinator; Internal Affairs Coordinator;

Student Life Coordinator; Sustainability Coordinator; External Affairs and Mobilization Coordinator

- **Salary (each):** \$26,795.60
- **Bonus (each):** \$2,572.38 (total: \$29,367.98)
- **Undergraduate student population:** 23,965 (2011/12)
- **Financial statements:** [Here](#) (2013/14)
- **Benefits:** CSU [health and dental plan](#)

Full-time undergrads at Concordia pay \$1.79 per credit in CSU general operation fees. For a student taking 12 credits per term — Concordia's definition of full-time — that works out to \$42.96 per year.

The CSU's most recent financial statements online are from 2013/14. In that year, they collected \$1,692,352 in student fees and \$334,045 in "other revenues." Like most student unions, their biggest expense line item (after health plan premiums) was administration, at \$2,319,822.

Overall, the CSU exited 2014 with a \$331,793 deficit in their general fund, but a \$859,039 surplus overall — the latter figure includes the Student Centre, Student Space, Accessible Education and Legal Contingency funds.

The CSU did not respond to request for more recent financial statements by press time.

Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU)

- **Executive roles (seven):** President; VP Operations; VP University Affairs; VP Student Life; VP External Affairs; VP Internal Affairs; VP Finance
- **"Stipends" (each):** \$28,798
- **Undergraduate student population:** 27,075
- **Work week:** 40 hours
- **Budget:** [Here](#)

On paper, SSMU execs work nine to five, but President Ben Ger says the workload can be anywhere from 60-90 hours.

Executives technically don't have to take classes while they're in office due to a recent change in the society's regulations, but they do in order to sit on university-level

committees — a decision from the McGill administration that has drawn the ire of some execs.

"They feel like they have the space to decide that. It's our perspective that we are working more than full-time jobs, and since our regulations have been changed it'd be nice to see the university respect and match that," said Ger.

The society collects a levy that varies depending on a student's program of study. For a student in arts, architecture, education, engineering, music, management, nursing, physical and occupational therapy, or science, the fee is \$85.90 per year. Students in law, religious studies, dentistry and medicine pay \$41.28.

As reported in the [McGill Daily](#), the SSMU held a referendum to increase their base levy fee by \$4.50 in February 2016, which failed by 18 votes. The referendum also included a question on adding an extra position to ease exec workloads, which received the green light.

The SSMU's budget was planned with the fee increase in mind, according to Ger. Its failure to pass caused "major cuts to areas such as student staff hours, governance-related budgets, executive portfolios, operational expenses (e.g. reduced building security and reduced building hours), the SSMU-subsidized portion of the Club Fund, and administrative expenses (e.g. salaries)," according to Zacheriah Houston, VP finance and operations of 2015/16.

Ger believes his salary, combined with the workload he undertakes, might be a deterrent for students considering an executive position within the SSMU.

Some executives, like the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union President Kehan Fu, believe the value of the work experience at least somewhat offsets the low hourly rate. Ger disagrees.

"Benefits to future career is a way of looking at it, but accessibility is another way, like, who are we giving these benefits to? I don't think there's a lot of people who have the privilege to be able to afford to work that much and ... put themselves at risk for mental health harm for that sort of salary. This is unfortunately the tone we hear again and again when it comes to justifications for things like unpaid internships," he said.

To make the positions more accessible, Ger suggests a higher rate of compensation, either in the form of a salary increase or coverage of living costs such as housing.

—*With files from Bradley Metlin and John Harvey*