

A Comment and Proposal Concerning Consideration of Faculty/Divisional Structure at Simon Fraser University

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1. Introduction: A Need to Look at the Big Picture

This Task Force represents an historical opportunity to examine any and all aspects of the organizational structure of Simon Fraser University. From all appearances this has been examined systematically only once before, in 1980, with little apparent success on-the-ground (Beirne, 1980). Units instead have grown up mainly in a layered or incremental fashion based on a combination of special pleading, departmental fragmentation, and periodic vice-presidential re-alignments since their initial structure was first laid out in 1964 (Baker, 1964; Johnston, 2005).

Although the current effort has also been driven by the same impetuses, the current administration is to be congratulated for having 'put all possible options on the table' and not to have limited discussion to slight or marginal modifications of the status quo.

Despite this effort, however, discussions with present and past Task Force members, presenters of briefs and proposals, and other colleagues, suggests that a distinct possibility is that discussions will in fact focus only on incremental changes to the status quo, notably involving the dissolution and re-alignment of units currently contained in the Faculty of Applied Science. While important, these are only some of the issues with which the Task Force should be concerned (Cameron, 2002; Pocklington and Tupper, 2002; Lumsden, 1974; Gumport and Pusser 1997) and it is the intent of this brief to suggest larger issues and options which should be investigated and discussed by the Task Force and its Working Groups in their deliberations.

These include options such as the territorial re-distribution of Faculties by campus, the combination and re-combination of Faculties into non-territorially-based Colleges, and the merger and division of existing Faculties into more equally representative units. The origins of some of these options and aspects of their merits and demerits vis a vis the current situation at SFU are discussed below. Given the timeline for presentations to the Task Force, however, these comments are necessarily perfunctory and indicative and the evidence presented for them by no means exhaustive. It is intended merely to ensure that such possible non-incremental changes are raised and discussed in more depth in the future deliberations of the Task Force and its reports.

2. Historical Origin of University Divisions

a. Divisional Structure in University History

Universities have always had divisions separating groups of faculty members, although these go by a variety of different names in different institutions and national contexts (Departments, Schools, Colleges, Faculties, Divisions, Centres, Programmes, and Institutes). In Europe the main models were the English (Oxford/Cambridge) style residential college and the French (University of Paris) style University and Faculties (Haskins, 1923; Ferruolo 1988). The residential college style is still in existence, in theory at least, in England and in many of those institutions modeled on the Oxbridge model (including, for example, the University of Toronto (see Flavell, et al, 1906), Harvard¹, Yale² and others). In practice, however, both Oxford,³ Cambridge,⁴ and Harvard now have a set of disciplinary and inter-disciplinary divisions which have been, to a certain extent, backward mapped onto the Residential Colleges.⁵

The University/Division model began in Paris where four distinct Faculties - Law, Theology, Arts and Medicine - had joined together by 1215 to create the University (Haskins, 1923 p. 16). This model was exported to the rest of the world through its emulation by institutions in Italy (Florence) and Holland (Leiden) (Grafton, 1988) from whence it came to be used in key institutions involved in the creation of universities in North America. As is well known, in Canada, the University of Edinburgh (re-modeled after Leiden in the 18th century) (Phillipson, 1988) and in the U.S., the University of Berlin, which served as the model of the research/graduate oriented university adopted by John Hopkins University (and others like Cornell and the University of Chicago) in the late 19th century (Lohmann, 2004; McClelland, 1988; Pocklington and Tupper, 2002), were the most emulated structural models.⁶

¹ (<http://www.harvard.edu/academics/>).

² (<http://www.yale.edu/schools/index.html>)

³ (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/aboutoxford/unicol.shtml>) and <http://www.ox.ac.uk/departments>

⁴ <http://www.cam.ac.uk/cambuniv/pubs/works/departments.html>)

⁵ While the reverse is true of Yale University which has continued to create residential colleges.

⁶ While Faculties and other forms of Divisions have been in existence for some time, the office of the Dean, interestingly enough, is a much newer phenomenon, being established in U.S. post-secondary institutions only 40 years after the median dates of their founding; on average around 1913 for universities established by 1934 (Gould, 1964 p. 2).

Many major universities in the U.S. now retain the University/Divisional form, such as notable State universities like the University of Michigan⁷ which owe their origin to the U.S. Land Grant system (Hammond, 2004; Pocklington and Tupper, 2002). However, other first tier institutions like Stanford⁸ and Berkeley,⁹ and other “Ivy League” institutions such as Princeton,¹⁰ have grouped faculties into non-residential College systems which place similar Faculties, Schools and other units together by student programme orientation - typically into Colleges of Undergraduate Studies, those of Graduate Studies, and those of Professional Studies (Burn, 1974). Others, notably the major State systems (California, New York, Minnesota and others) have developed large multi-campus systems, most of which feature a number of more or less independent universities offering a wide range of general degrees but which shared some administrative and governance mechanisms (Lee and Bowen, 1974).

Most universities in Canada typically retain a Divisional/Faculty structure with numerous permutations among the specific subjects given Faculty status. Some have antiquated residential (e.g. the University of Toronto¹¹) or denominational college systems (the University of Alberta¹², The University of Manitoba¹³, the University of Western Ontario¹⁴ and others). Only a small minority have a college system focused on separate specialized campuses in a multi-campus environment (e.g. McGill University¹⁵, York University¹⁶). Most multi-campus Canadian universities (e.g. SFU, UBC, Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of Toronto, Concordia University¹⁷) have not separated these into distinct territorial colleges. Only Quebec has a large multi-campus system (the University of Quebec) similar to that of the U.S. states.

b. The Origins of the Current SFU Divisional Structure

If there was any kind of a model for SFU it was UBC as most of the initial founders, Board Members, faculty, administrators, and staff had either worked or studied there; some for very long periods of time (Johnston, 2005; Clark, 2003). The UBC model, in turn, was inherited from McGill University which offered the first degrees in British Columbia, both at UBC and at Victoria College (later the University of Victoria) (MacDonald, 1962; Province of British Columbia, 1908). McGill was closely modeled on the University of Edinburgh and so inherited the University of Paris style University/Divisional system rather than the Oxbridge residential college system.

Like the initial choice of structures, the evolution of Faculty units at SFU since its inception has been very much a haphazard and ad hoc affair. When the University was first set up it had only one Faculty - Education - and 12 Departments. The Department heads and one Dean (all appointed by the President as elections only came about after the agitations in the late 1960's) met as a President's advisory council. Vice-Presidents were just being introduced into Canada after models in the US and were slow to come to SFU. The 12 departments were Economics & Commerce; English; Geography; History; Modern Languages; Philosophy; Politics, Sociology & Anthropology; Psychology; Biological Sciences; Chemistry; Mathematics (in which Computing Science was a subject area); and Physics (Johnston, 2005, p. 86).

Most of the joint Departments later split up (including Archaeology which emerged out of Anthropology, and Computing Science which broke away from Mathematics) as did Modern Languages which divided in 1989 into Linguistics, French, Spanish and Latin American Studies. The idea of having Education as a separate Faculty seems to have come from its professional status vs Arts & Sciences as UG and Graduate-oriented (Johnston, 2005, p. 87 and 101).

It is not clear when the decision was made to create two Deans in separate Faculties of Arts and Science but these were in place by at least 1968-69 if not earlier - although in the early years they appear to have had only one-year terms in office in order to complete duties of a largely statutory or ceremonial purpose (Johnston, p. 96). The main reasoning behind the move to regularize these two Faculties seems to have been simultaneous complaints from the chairs that they were doing too much administrative work under the Council system, and from the senior administration that the chair system was inefficient.

Most of the initial growth in Departments, and subsequently Faculties, in the 1960s and 1970s came from units breaking off from Education. It had been organized at the outset into five programs - PDP or teacher training; Behavioural Science; Social and Philosophical Studies; Physical Development; and Communication & Arts. Physical Development became Kinesiology and Communication & Arts broke up into Communications and Fine and Performing Arts. The new Vice President Academic hired in 1970 put the old education units (Kinesiology, Communication and Fine and Performing Arts) and Computing science into a Faculty of General Studies that became a Division of General Studies and then a Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies (Johnston, 2005 p. 239). New

⁷ (<http://www.umich.edu/units.php>)

⁸ (<http://www.stanford.edu/home/academics/>)

⁹ (<http://www.berkeley.edu/academics/#college>)

¹⁰ (to a lesser extent, see <http://www.princeton.edu/main/academics/who/>)

¹¹ <http://www.utoronto.ca/>

¹² (<http://www.ualberta.ca/~publicas/uofa/faculties/index.html>)

¹³ (<http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/>)

¹⁴ (<http://communications.uwo.ca/about/faculties.htm>)

¹⁵ (<http://www.mcgill.ca/about/>).

¹⁶ - http://www.yorku.ca/web/about_yorku

¹⁷ (<http://www.concordia.ca/about/overview/>)

Departments were subsequently allocated to this unit. Criminology (which had started when UBC rejected a proposal for a police studies program) and Women's Studies (promoted by Pauline Jewett when she became president) were added in 1975. Continuing Studies was granted Faculty status in 1974 (Johnston, 2005, p. 335).

In the early 1980s the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies was abolished, ostensibly due to budget restraint measures, and some of its units sent to Arts (Criminology, Contemporary Arts, Women's Studies), with the remainder remaining as the Faculty of Applied Science (Johnston, 2005, p. 248). Also around the same time Departments of Engineering Science, Gerontology and REM emerged with two of these new units going to Applied Science and one to Arts. Business Administration was created as a separate Faculty in 1981 when commerce split from Economics (Johnston, 2005, p. 230). In the 1990s the Departments in the Faculty of Applied Science renamed themselves as 'Schools' without actually altering any of their activities or directions (personal interview with Applied Science School Chair, 2007). Health, was created as a faculty only in the 1990s/2000 under the leadership of the VP Academic and the name of the Faculty of Arts was changed to the Faculty of Arts and Social Science.

Hence the record of growth of Faculties at SFU by decade has been:

1. Pre 1970 - Arts, Science, Education
2. 1970 - Arts, Science, Education, Interdisciplinary Studies
3. 1980 - Arts, Science, Education, Continuing Studies, Applied Science, Business
4. 2000 - Arts and Social Science, Science, Education, Continuing Studies, Applied Science, Business, Health

Several observations about the SFU university structure and the principles behind it can be made on the basis of this brief discussion. First, the system at SFU was inherited from other institutions, notably UBC, probably with little thought given to possible alternative modes of organization and governance. Second, there has never been a major deviation from the original University/Division system inherited from UBC. Third, there has also never been any clear rationale for the use of the term 'Faculty' at SFU - except right at the beginning when it had a professional connotation - and the term can be thought of as an essentially neutral one like "Division". Fourth, sub-Faculty units like Departments and Schools have emerged through an idiosyncratic set of processes which have played an important role in subsequent Faculty adjustments. Fifth, like 'Faculty', the designation of a 'School' does not mean anything special at SFU but is only a kind of synonym for "Department" with a slight pretense towards either interdisciplinarity or Department-"plus" status, unlike at other universities where it is used to designate either or both professional programs or multi-disciplinary ones.¹⁸ Sixth, the general pattern of change in administrative units at SFU has been one in which discontent in the ranks leads to units splitting from Faculties, followed by VPAs periodically merging these disenfranchised units into new Faculties.

While the existing system has been workable, it is a system which tends towards the proliferation of smaller and smaller units and contributes to the types of grievances which, in turn, promote further fragmentation. That is, the ad hoc nature of the governance of local units at SFU results in a system which is perceived by units as neither fair, transparent nor efficient. Distinctions between departments, schools and programs need to be regularized and made meaningful. Concerns about gaps in equity between and across units, to do with workloads, faculty-student ratios, and relative levels of funding and other such factors are endemic and need to be addressed.

Moreover, in addition to its self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating nature, the existing divisional system, among other things, (1) creates an ever larger set of silos discouraging interdisciplinary research and teaching; (2) tends to create more and more 'vetopoints' in the University administrative system promoting a status quo orientation and (3) generates ever larger University-level committees encouraging tendencies towards 'garbage can' decision-making (based on personalities of key participants in anarchical decisional situations based on contingency and chance) (Cohen, March et al., 1979).

Taken together these developments tend to discourage innovation and inventiveness, promote a reliance on incrementalism, encourage formalism and 'professionalization' of administration (and a concomitant decline in faculty participation in University governance). This contributes greatly to a status quo orientation in terms of setting University priorities and distributing University resources, making it more difficult for the University to react and adapt to changing circumstances and needs of its students and communities, a direction and orientation towards which SFU prides itself and ostensibly places great value.

3. Organizational Options and Assessment

From the discussion at the start of the previous section it is clear that the University/Division system is not the only structure available to a University in establishing its basic administration and governance regime. Rather, even a cursory overview of University websites and histories such as is contained herein reveals several distinct organizational

¹⁸ The previous 1980 Re-structuring Task Force saw a major role for Schools as both a means of fostering interdisciplinary development; easing administrative burdens in large Faculties, and equalizing voting weights in University Committees (see Beirne, 1980)

options from which a University such as SFU might choose in (re)structuring its administration (Baldrige, Curtis et al, 1977a). At minimum the following alternative modes of organization are currently in place at major and top-ranked institutions in the U.S. and Great Britain either in their 'pure' form or in different kinds of 'hybrid' arrangements.

1. The Residential or Denominational College system
2. The Multi-Campus College system
3. The Student-Service College system
4. The University/Division system

The appropriateness of any of these options for SFU is a proper subject for further deliberation by the Task Force and it is sincerely hoped that the members of the Task Force and university community will undertake their elaboration and investigation with due diligence and care. A few salient points on each general option vis a vis the specific nature of the SFU environment and context, however, are set out below.

4. Assessment of Appropriateness of Alternative Organizational Options for SFU

1. The Residential or Denominational College system

The residential college system, as it exists in many universities, appears to be a throwback to much earlier forms of student participation in, and funding arrangements for, universities and to have been abandoned in all but name by most current universities. It has been designed into the foundations of only one or two modern Canadian universities (e.g. Trent University¹⁹ and Trinity Western University) and the older ones listed above. Prima facie, it does not appear compatible with contemporary secular, non-residential student bodies and public university funding arrangements.

2. The Multi-Campus College System

This system is in place at some U.S. institutions (e.g. John Hopkins University²⁰) and, in Canada, at York and McGill University. However at York University it is associated with having a second non-English speaking instructional unit (Glendon College) while at McGill University it is linked to the need for a downtown university to access ample land for an agricultural school (MacDonald College). At John Hopkins it sits uneasily with a divisional structure that is not evenly distributed across campuses (i.e. a territorial focus appears to work better for a specialized Medical Faculty than for larger units such as Arts and Science). Other prominent multi-campus Universities (e.g. Toronto and Concordia) make few apparent efforts to closely align campuses and academic divisions.

Although an effort to align campuses and Faculties could be undertaken at SFU,²¹ the presence of sunk costs in existing buildings and facilities would make this prohibitively expensive or, at best, a long-term objective to be phased in over a 10-20 year period. Moreover it is unclear how such a territorially-based division of labour would promote interdisciplinarity or innovation rather than exacerbate the autonomy of existing Faculty silos. On the face of it, it would seem to be an example of structure driving strategy rather than vice versa.

3. The Student-Service College System

As noted above, this system is in place at many major first tier universities in the United States, currently ranked by many as among the best universities on the globe. Probably the clearest example of this model is at MIT where it is unencumbered by the legacy of residential college systems which preceded its adoption at most Ivy League Schools.²²

This system involves formal (and informal) arrangements grouping units by their orientation towards undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees and instruction. Since many of these universities evolved out of earlier residential, denominational or University/Division systems, there is no reason why this transition could not occur at SFU. If this option is at all linked to the high levels of excellence and prestige enjoyed by top tier institutions - for example, in balancing the needs of undergraduates with those of graduate students and professional schools, and breaking down existing silos and multiple vetopoints contained in University/Division systems - it would behoove SFU to examine this model closely.

This should not be simply an exercise in institutional isomorphism or memesis, of course, (Sporn, 1999) but a clear and level-headed assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this potential alternative structural model vis a vis those of the present University/Division model employed at SFU. The 1980 proposal to create a Faculty of

¹⁹ <http://www.trentu.ca/parentsandfamily>

²⁰ http://webapps.jhu.edu/jhuniverse/schools_centers_affiliates

²¹ For example, linking the current Faculties of Science and Applied Science to laboratory facilities at Burnaby, Professional programs like Business, Health, and Education to mature student accessibility to Harbour Centre, some kind of new Faculty of Contemporary Arts to urban facilities at Woodward's, some form of new faculty of Applied Arts to the Great Northern Way location, while Humanities and Social Science moved to Surrey.

²² <http://web.mit.edu/education/>

Graduate Studies, for example (see Beirne, 1980), while rejected at that date, may well be an idea whose time has arrived as the need for flexibility and interdisciplinarity at the graduate level has emerged and may require granting the Graduate Dean the ability to fund and deliver specialized interdisciplinary graduate programmes. The same may be true of the 1980 proposal to create a Faculty of Arts and Science, and a Faculty of Professional Studies (and one for Continuing Studies). The reasons cited at the time - that these changes were needed to provide a superior educational experience for students by grouping them together in like programmes - are, in most cases, even more pressing at the present juncture (Beirne, 1980). As a long-time SFU Vice President (Academic) put it during his term as Associate Dean of Arts in 1976:

The University, or at least large parts of it, could be re-structured into a number of colleges. Each could have its own departments and, perhaps, its own designated role in the University's academic programs... This type of organization is in some ways more consistent with the initial purposes of Simon Fraser University and it is somewhat strange that it was never given serious consideration (Munro, 1976 p. 3)

Key questions about this model's appropriateness to SFU, however, remain to be answered. One, for example, would be whether it can operate well in a publicly funded university resource environment. It may be that such a model only works well when private universities and "crown jewel" public institutions (e.g., Berkeley) are able to secure needed funding from both public and private sources as well as a range of endowments and high tuition fee revenues.

4. The University/Division System

Again, as noted above, numerous permutations of this system exist both in Canada, North America and Europe and, increasingly, Asia. A brief survey of the literature on university structure, however, did not succeed in locating any over-riding or overarching logic, or any set of generally recognized principles, for designing a divisional structure which would help institutional (re)designers establish such critical foundational parameters as the proper or appropriate number of faculties and divisions, their appropriate relative sizes, orientations or relationships (Baldrige, Curtis et al, 1977b).²³ This is surprising given the number of such institutions which exist around the globe and the presence within them of many experts on organizational structure and behaviour, and university administration (sometimes, of course, in the same person or persons). This lack suggests that many structures, such as those at SFU, have tended to develop in an ad hoc, incremental, layered and idiosyncratic fashion based on special pleading and relatively short-term concerns related to such factors as funding, personalities or fashion but, once in place, exhibit significant path dependencies.

A tentative suggestion for overcoming this institutionalized ad hocery in university design, however, would be to base the basic divisional structure either on student orientation (as in the case of the student-service college system cited above) or on significant variations in the basic methodologies or epistemologies followed by different distinct sets of academicians. Each option would create its own unique system of silos, of course, but the Task Force can judge the merits of each pattern vis a vis that created by the existing divisional system.

The first option would generate an overall system of Faculties or Divisions very similar to the student-service oriented College system: grouping existing and/or new Faculties into Divisions for undergraduate, graduate and professional studies which would function very much like the student service College system although with a different nomenclature (e.g. each 'College' would be a 'new' Faculty, while existing Faculties would become either a new "School" within a Division or retain their existing Faculty status). This would approximate the student-service College system within a Divisional system. The danger that it might simply create a new layer of administration on top of the existing Faculty structure would be avoided if the new 'Divisions' were funded, at least in part, through the savings arising from the merger of smaller existing Faculties.

The second option would leave the basic University/Divisional structure more or less in place, but would consider more than simply a bottom-up, plea or funding driven re-identification of Faculties and instead group units together in terms of their basic epistemologies: Scientific or experimental, Social Scientific or observational, Humanities or hermeneutic/interpretive, and Fine Arts or creative, and Professional or practical/applied. This model is similar to that found at Harvard University and at some prominent European universities, notably in Germany. Again, adoptions of such a model would require not simply the re-organization or fragmentation of some existing Faculty units, as has been proposed in this current round of discussions at SFU but also the merger of others, an idea which has not yet been seriously assessed by the Task Force.

There is no intent here to suggest a return to a top-down effort to establish rigorous epistemological boundaries or an outmoded generalist tradition. Rather, the idea is that excellence in teaching and research could be served by a clearer administrative framework, which would balance epistemological approaches and the emergence of new specialist fields in a "bottom up" fashion. Like other aspects of these options, however, these are empirical questions which the Task Force should investigate.

²³ Tierney (1999) suggests that this lack of generally accepted guiding principles should lead designers to emphasize improving administrative culture rather than structure in re-designing Universities. However his own work in fact focuses upon enumerating basic design principles such as encouraging faculty autonomy and flexibility, streamlining processes and generally 'flattening' organizational hierarchies.

5. Proposal

On the basis of the above discussion, it is urged that the Task Force broaden its options to seriously investigate and evaluate the merits and demerits of at least two of the general models set out above - the student-service College model and the epistemological University/Division model. It should not restrict its focus solely to special pleading on the part of disaffected units in existing Faculties demanding Faculty status within the existing ad hoc University/Division system. Re-design, rather than tinkering, as Tierney (1999 p. 161) argues, should be the expected outcome of any governance re-appraisal. That way even the maintenance of the existing system would have to survive rigorous review and comparison against the merits and demerits of potential alternatives, rather than simply be taken as given.

I would urge the committee to address the alternatives raised here as well as other possible structural configurations for the University and develop a small number of options which could be subject to a further university-wide discussion and consultation process. The Task Force should focus on developing at least two options in much greater detail, including budgetary implications during 2008. If given the opportunity by the Task Force it is certain that others will push forward different approaches and refinement as these two alternatives are put under the microscope. Such discussions of fundamental restructuring policy would no doubt raise and help reconcile different philosophies about the role of the comprehensive university, and its mission in advancing disciplinary and interdisciplinary study. All changes would also require changes in corresponding governance systems and voting weights on University committees, whose implications and design should be carefully considered alongside with any proposal for structural reform.

The Task Force should also address the processes by which any final option or choice of options would be presented to the University for ratification. Putting any major change into effect, should such a result emerge from this consultation process, would only work effectively if there is broader engagement and 'buy in' by faculty members. This is not to say that any established governance channels be bypassed, but that they might need to be supplemented with additional engagement mechanisms that are proportional to the scale of change, for example, a university-wide referendum or public hearing process accompanied by the preparation and distribution of educational materials in the event of a final proposal to adopt a major re-configuration of Faculties and/or a corresponding Departmental re-alignment.

This is not intended in any way to prejudice the outcome of the Task Force deliberations or to merely slow or delay any changes the committee feels may be necessary. Even a modest restructuring is really a 3 - 5 year undertaking, and a major one is in the 5-10 year range - perhaps up to 20 if physical infrastructure has to be redeveloped to accommodate the transition to a new campus based organizational structure. Rather it is a plea for the Task Force not to act hastily in the investigative phase of its deliberations and to not simply promote and entrench the status quo through a pressure-driven process leading to another round of ad hoc and incremental structural 'reforms', as has characterized previous such efforts at this institution. The committee should take the time and make the effort required to establish an organizational structure that fully reflects the SFU strategy of innovation, responsiveness, inventiveness and excellence in University life through the promotion of the principles of Departmental autonomy, democratically empowered and engaged faculty, staff and students, and the careful balancing of demands for disciplinary specialization and interdisciplinarity in university governance and administration.

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