Curriculum Implementation Project
Synopsis of the Discussion Paper

In Fall 2002, Senate approved in principle significant changes to SFU’s undergraduate curriculum. After lengthy deliberation, the committees charged with refining and implementing those changes have prepared a set of recommendations and focus questions, which they offer in the context of a Discussion Paper. We encourage you to read the Discussion Paper and to send us your comments and suggestions. Following a period of consultation, we intend to revise the recommendations and present them to Senate for final approval in May or June of 2004.

The proposed changes are aimed at improving SFU undergraduate students’ writing and quantitative abilities and extending their exposure to the ideas and modes of inquiry of disciplines other than those in which they specialize. If effectively implemented, we believe these changes will enhance our students’ educational experience, increase their capacity to fulfill their civic responsibilities, better prepare them for graduate studies and improve their employment prospects. We also believe the changes will enhance the reputation of SFU and the value of our Bachelor’s degrees. Implementing these changes will also introduce opportunities for new and exciting teaching experiences and help establish a more unified curriculum.

Implicit in our recommendations is a three-pronged approach to the enhancement of writing and quantitative abilities: (a) increasing the proportion of students who possess at admission the writing and quantitative abilities we expect; (b) offering students with problems in writing or quantitative abilities the assistance they need; and (c) requiring all students to whom we grant Bachelor’s degrees to take courses designed to foster writing and quantitative abilities.

With respect to breadth, we recommend that all undergraduate students be required to take courses outside their programs of study, including a set of courses specially designed to introduce them to the ideas and methods of the humanities, sciences and social sciences.

In searching for and attempting to develop effective means of implementing these recommendations, we have addressed several particularly challenging questions:

1. How can we increase the proportion of students we admit who possess the writing and quantitative abilities we expect and they need? How best can we assess the writing and quantitative abilities of students applying to SFU?

   We propose to require that all students we admit obtain high grades in English courses and/or an acceptable grade on the essay component of an appropriate language proficiency test. We propose that students transferring from other post-secondary institutions meet the same English and math requirements as students admitted directly from high school.
2. How can we ensure that students who register for W and Q courses are adequately prepared to take them?

In addition to refining our admission standards, we propose to employ grades in high school English and math courses and/or scores on the essay component of language proficiency tests and course-specific tests of quantitative abilities to place students in appropriate courses. Students who are not adequately prepared to take W and Q courses will be encouraged or required to take courses that help them to acquire the prerequisite skills.

3. What are W, Q and B courses? How can we distinguish courses that warrant these designations from courses that do not?

We have developed initial definitions for W, Q and B courses, sent them to all programs for comment, and revised the definitions in response to the suggestions and concerns we received. We include the revised definitions in the Discussion Paper and offer examples of courses that we believe meet the criteria.

4. What models for teaching W, Q and B courses should we support?

We outline a variety of models and list a preliminary set of evaluation criteria.

5. What procedure should we use to certify courses as W, Q and B?

We propose that, in the initial stage, candidate courses be forwarded to the appropriate Support Group (W, Q and/or B) for evaluation. We propose that Support Groups review the courses and forward those they approve to the Task Force, which will submit them to SCUS, and so on through our normal course-approval procedures. Following the initial phase courses will be approved in the normal manner.

6. What procedures should we use to determine which courses from other post-secondary institutions are equivalent to our W, Q and B courses?

We propose to work with sending institutions to articulate W, Q and B courses. In the initial stages, the Support Groups and Task Force would offer assistance; thereafter, normal procedures would be employed.

7. Should all students be required to meet the proposed W, Q and B requirements?

We recommend that all students be required to meet the W and Q requirements. We outline a process through which Programs that do not provide enough elective credits for students to meet the B requirement may apply for their students to be exempted.

8. Should we place a limit on the time available for students to meet the proposed W and Q requirements?

We recommend that all students be encouraged to take at least one W and one Q course within their first 30 credit hours at SFU, and that they be required to do so within their first 60 credit hours at SFU.
9. **What kind of academic support should we offer students who need help developing their writing and quantitative skills?**

Our Mathematics Department currently offers two forms of quantitative support to students: foundational math skills courses and tutoring. These services may need to be expanded. We propose that SFU create a course designed to help students acquire foundational writing skills. We also recommend that a Task Force be created to examine existing student academic support facilities at SFU and to consider the idea of amalgamating and expanding them in a new centralized Student Learning Centre.

10. **What kind of instructional support should we offer faculty who want to develop W, Q and B courses?**

We describe several sources of support for faculty interested in developing W, Q and B courses, including the Learning and Instructional Development Centre and the Centre for Writing Intensive Learning.

11. **What resources will be needed to implement the new requirements?**

We are preparing estimates of the number of course places that will be required to enable students to fulfill the WQB requirements, the number of courses currently available, and the number of new courses that we will need to develop. The need to develop new writing courses, quantitative courses for humanities students, and “big idea” breadth courses will be particularly challenging.

12. **How will resources be allocated?**

We have developed preliminary principles and procedures for the allocation of resources for the development of W, Q and B courses.

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**A Call for Proposals: WQB Pilot Projects**

Programs are encouraged to submit pilot proposals for the development of W, Q and B courses, including an estimate of costs, in accordance with the guidelines outlined in Appendix D of the Discussion Paper. Proposals may be brief. We will try to evaluate the initial set of proposals (in consultation with Deans) by mid-January, 2004, and the next set by mid-March, 2004. We intend to make recommendations for funding to the VP Academic and Deans.