An introduction

As you may know, last October SFU's Senate approved in principle the establishment of several new requirements that, when implemented, will have to be met by all students completing Bachelors' degrees at SFU.

These requirements arise from our conviction that all university graduates, as educated people, should share certain qualities. Among these is the ability to express themselves effectively in speech and in writing. Those who are not able to express themselves well will not be able to communicate ideas to others, nor will they be able to define, develop and understand ideas themselves. Thus, they will be at a disadvantage in university classrooms and in the world beyond them. At SFU, students must be able to communicate effectively in English.

All SFU graduates should also be competent in the language and techniques of formal quantitative expression, reasoning and analysis. Educated people should be able to understand and critically evaluate quantitatively-based arguments; they also should have the ability to formulate and to advance such arguments themselves.

Finally, universities should offer undergraduate students a broad education, as well as training them in a particular academic specialty. Regardless of their specialty, all SFU graduates should be exposed to and familiar with the content and modes of inquiry of the sciences and applied sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities.

When implemented, the new requirements will provide all Simon Fraser students with both a common foundation for learning and a broad exposure to the knowledge, forms of thought and research methods that characterize the range of university-level study.

The requirements

The proposed new requirements will include: 6 credits in specifically-designated Writing courses (W); 6 credits in courses with Quantitative content (Q); and 24 credits of Breadth (B). Of the 24 credits of Breadth, between 12 and 18 credits will be in courses specifically designed to consider their subjects from a broader perspective than that often taken in courses developed primarily for majors.

We expect the requirements to be in place for all students admitted in Fall 2006 and thereafter. Also under review is the possibility of introducing language
and quantitative skills placement test(s) such as those required at UBC and UVic to ensure that incoming students register in the courses best suited to their abilities. Being considered are such questions as which test or tests to use, and when, for whom and how to use them.

To conduct the implementation of the requirements, the Undergraduate Curriculum Implementation Task Force (UCITF) and three support groups (one each for the Writing, Quantitative and Breadth requirements), were created and have been at work since early this year.

Before these requirements can be put in place, they must first be clearly defined. The UCITF and its support groups recently distributed to all programs, schools and departments a set of draft definitions of Writing, Quantitative and Breadth courses and are now receiving and collating their responses. Members of the implementation team have also met with the undergraduate curriculum committees for all faculties to discuss the requirements.

Over the next few months we will use the feedback we receive to refine and clarify the definitions for W, Q and B courses. We also will begin to compile a database of courses that are now offered and meet, or may be adapted to meet, the criteria for W, Q or B courses. And we will actively work to promote the development of new courses to the same end. Within a year, we hope to see pilot W, Q and B offerings listed in the Calendar and available for students to register in--although they will not yet be required to graduate.

We do not anticipate adopting a single model for any of the Writing, Quantitative or Breadth courses. Rather, we look forward to a collaboration in which programs bring their differing perspectives and expertise to our curriculum in innovative and creative ways. Whether they choose to adapt existing courses or to design new courses or course sequences, we hope that all programs will participate in this process.

We are still very much in the early stages of this project and it will be awhile before more detail can be meaningfully and accurately communicated. For now, those seeking more information are directed to our current website at http://www.sfu.ca/vpacademic/committees/frame.html.

If you have other questions or suggestions, please feel free to contact me as noted below.

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For more information about SFU’s Curriculum Implementation Project and the new Writing, Quantitative and Breadth requirements, please go to the Project web site at http://www.sfu.ca/vpacademic/committees/frame.html or contact the Project Coordinator, K.C. Bell, by email at kbell@sfu.ca or by phone at 604-268-6854.