SFU ACADEMIC PLAN UPDATE 06/2020
I am pleased to provide a summary of progress made on the SFU Academic Plan 2019-2024. As you will see we have collectively taken action on all of the major challenges that we set for ourselves. Most of the initiatives involved numerous employees, students and faculty members, as leaders, participants and advisors. In addition, local and university-wide committees and other governance structures, such as Senate, have taken the steps needed to implement and operationalize recommendations. I thank everyone who has helped with these important projects.

Jonathan C. Driver, PhD, RPA  
Vice-President Academic and Provost pro tem

INTRODUCTION

The SFU Academic Plan 2019-2024 was released in fall 2018. The plan was created through a consultative process with the SFU community and strives to integrate SFU’s innovative education, cutting-edge research, and far-reaching community engagement. Embracing its role as Canada’s engaged university, SFU has developed a plan that builds upon the foundations of previous academic plans while simultaneously supporting and promoting the university’s vision and its corresponding core themes.

SFU Vision:
• To be the leading engaged university defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research, and far-reaching community engagement.

Core Themes:
• Engaging Students
  o To equip students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences that prepare them for life in an ever-changing and challenging world.

• Engaging Research
  o To be a world leader in knowledge mobilization building on a strong foundation of fundamental research.

• Engaging Communities
  o To be Canada’s most community-engaged research university.
SFU’s vision has been the cornerstone of all university planning since its inception in 2012. Previous academic plans were built upon its foundation, but for this iteration, the university took a bold step beyond its previous norms to revive the spirit of the radical campus from which SFU originated in 1965. The university turned to the people in its community for inspiration, asking them where they wanted SFU to go.

With the vision always at the centre, community feedback provided a clear path forward: SFU wants to provide exceptional and distinctive academic programming and an outstanding student experience to continue to grow its world-class scholarship and creativity, to advance its mutually beneficial relationships with the community, and to contribute to social infrastructure for a better world. To do this, the Academic Plan identifies five challenges that SFU will need to focus on to continue to be a leading engaged university and active participant in the innovation and dialogue that shape our future.

- Challenge 1: Student Life, Learning, and Success
- Challenge 2: Academic Quality/Curriculum
- Challenge 3: Engagement
- Challenge 4: Bridging Divides/Interdisciplinarity
- Challenge 5: Faculty and Staff Renewal

The challenges form the foundation of the plan and provide focus for all supportive strategies and initiatives.

As SFU continues to develop projects, find resources, assign leads, and stimulate activities that support each of the five challenges identified in the plan, it continues to encourage all students, staff, and faculty to find opportunities to contribute and engage toward the successful implementation of this plan.

This update shows how we’re addressing the five challenges and progress we’re making so far. We’ve highlighted only select initiatives that support each challenge.

**THE FIVE CHALLENGES**

**Challenge 1: Student Life, Learning, and Success**

>To foster a supportive curricular, co-curricular, and physical learning environment that empowers students for life while ensuring timely degree completion.

SFU is committed to enhancing the services, programs, opportunities, and environments that optimize student learning and success. Students’ overall well-being is paramount to this
commitment. To that end, SFU has developed several initiatives, programs, and services across all three campuses to support its students’ mental health and well-being.

The Academic Plan addresses all aspects of student life, learning, and success with a multitude of current and new initiatives designed specifically to help students succeed as they walk their educational paths. Starting with recruitment and registration and continuing through to graduation, the Academic Plan and its ensuing initiatives will ensure that students have the necessary supports at their disposal to be successful.

Below are a few examples of recent initiatives in support of this challenge:

- **Review of Student Programs and Services**
  The Vice-President, Academic commissioned Keeling & Associates to undertake an external review to thoughtfully examine the university’s delivery of student programs and services and how they impact the student experience, with three primary areas of focus: (1) how Student Services (as an organizational unit) and services delivered in the academic units (faculties, departments, and schools, etc.) collectively function, operate, and serve students; (2) how SFU as a whole supports students and their learning and achievement; and (3) how SFU might advance the student experience across its three campuses and online.
  The final report will be released in the fall.

- **The Student Experience Initiative**
  This initiative was launched in 2016 when SFU’s President identified the need to enhance the student experience with the mandate to “make a meaningful difference for our students and provide a positive, healthy, and exciting environment in which to learn and thrive.” Work will continue on the Student Experience Initiative into 2021. A number of working groups have been established and some of their achievements to date are as follows:

  - The Building Community and a Sense of Belonging working group has conducted over 2,170 student consultations across all three campuses.
  - The Improving Communication with Students working group developed a digital playbook of best practices for frontline communication staff across the university.
  - The Destination SFU working group is creating more welcoming study spaces by enhancing seven study spaces at the Vancouver campus, 18 spaces at the Surrey campus, and the prayer space at the Surrey campus.
  - The Ideas Too Good to Ignore group has funded a project led by the Graduate Student Society to inform graduate students of their rights and to raise awareness about policies and best practices.
  - The Healthier Campus Community working group introduced MySSP, which provides SFU students access to free 24/7 counselling and mental health support that is reachable from anywhere around the world either by phone or through the downloadable app. More than 150 mental health and well-being student support and referral workshops have been offered over the past 18 months by Health and Counselling Services staff.
  - The Supervision for the 21st Century group provided support to graduate students in the thesis and dissertation writing stage of their graduate career.
  - The Navigating SFU working group has been reviewing policies, processes, and procedures across all three campuses to ensure that they are student-centred.

- **Pathways**
  Effective September 2020, a new agreement between SFU and Langara College was signed that paves the way for Indigenous students to transfer more easily from the college to SFU to complete their degree programs.
The Indigenous Pathways program and the Aboriginal University Transition program review is complete, and a final report will be released in the fall.

SFU has extended its 14-year partnership with Navitas, which operates Fraser International College, to continue strengthening the university’s international engagement strategy.

Lifelong Learning is exploring a pathway into the Beedie School of Business, offering a graduate diploma based on competencies. This initiative is being funded by the provincial government.

Work is being done by the Strategic Enrollment Management Council–Non-Credit to explore transitioning between credit and non-credit programming and concurrent registrations in non-credit and credit courses in some areas.

• Improving Course Access
A new policy on classroom and course scheduling has been approved by Senate and is in the process of being implemented. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that classrooms and courses are effectively scheduled such that:

- Classroom spaces are efficiently utilized.
- Students can access courses in a reasonable and timely manner.
- The educational experience for students and instructors is accounted for.
- Course scheduling conflicts for students are minimized.
- Course access in general is improved.
- There is scheduling equity across academic units.
- Instructors can reasonably integrate all their professional duties, i.e., teaching, research, and community service.

Exam scheduling software is now being used to minimize conflicts within the examination period. This will allow students to better plan their studies and shorten graduation times through improved course access.

Challenge 2: Academic Quality/Curriculum

*To embrace a coherent curriculum review with focus on innovative curriculum design and delivery.*

As a comprehensive research university that respects and values diversity, SFU charges its academic units with planning and reviewing their programs with regard to their disciplinary standards, evolving knowledge bases, and pedagogical strengths while
supporting new program development in areas of demand and curricular relevance.

The following initiatives adhere to these principles while also placing emphasis on the importance of advancing a curriculum that serves underrepresented students.

This goal has a longer horizon and it may take several years to fully achieve. However, several activities are underway:

- **Curriculum Reform**

  **General Education Review**
  A committee, led by the Associate Vice-President, Learning and Teaching, will be struck to lead the review of SFU’s General Education system, which is comprised of writing, quantitative, and breadth (WQB) courses. The committee will:

  - Explore a forward-looking vision for the General Education component of the SFU curriculum.
  - Analyze through significant consultation with all stakeholder groups on campus, the extent to which the WQB model meets SFU’s current and planned curricular and student experience goals, and recommend changes.
  - Identify the extent to which the complexity of WQB requirements is affecting the student experience and the ability to access courses and graduate.
  - Validate and/or create new definitions of WQB courses (or their replacement), and define the processes and procedures required for the ongoing management and analysis of the General Education curriculum model.

  **Curricula Review**
  In a recent audit of Senate papers from fall 2018 to summer 2020 (inclusive) by the Office of University Curriculum and Institutional Liaison, it was found that, across the eight faculties, 55 per cent of departments/programs had identified changes that are aimed at making a positive impact on graduation requirements, i.e., the simplification of graduation requirements. This degree of curricula review is significant, and Deans and Chairs are encouraged to continue reviewing their curricula with a view to ensuring relevance to modern demands for knowledge and to contemporary pedagogical appropriateness.

- **Educational Goals**

  A process for defining and assessing educational goals has been set in place, and units undergoing external reviews will have their educational goals and their assessment plans/results reviewed by the Senate Committee on University Teaching and Learning.

- **New Programs**

  Two subcommittees within the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies have been established to review/develop policy and regulations regarding degree completion rates, course access, and new degree/program approval requirements. This process will result in a consistent procedure for new program development and review. These initiatives are aimed at increasing the efficiency of the approval process and to avoid duplication and redundancy.

- **Assessment of Teaching**

  Two working groups recently released reports on the assessment of teaching:

  The Student Evaluation of Teaching and Course Working Group report, which includes an extensive literature review to inform best practices of assessment, explored SFU policies and practices at other institutions related
to assessment of teaching and presented an inventory of teaching assessment methods other than student opinion surveys. The working group also produced an important teaching assessment framework with five principles: 1) use multiple methods, 2) use multiple sources, 3) assess at multiple points in time, 4) view assessment holistically, and 5) align assessment with an instructor’s career path.

The Teaching Assessment Working Group report re-emphasized this assessment framework, and, in addition, made recommendations for the adoption of the framework in tenure and promotion criteria. The working group also called for training of Tenure and Promotion Committee (TPC) members regarding the assessment of teaching and suggested that the university could do better in celebrating teaching effectiveness, not only through awards but also through additional non-competitive methods.

In May 2020, Senate passed a motion from the Senate Committee on University Teaching and Learning (SCUTL) to implement four broad recommendations, synthesizing the work of these two working groups. These were:

- TPC guidelines should be revised to more effectively assess teaching, with SCUTL providing formative feedback on these guidelines.
- The framework and questions in the Student Evaluation of Teaching and Courses survey should be reviewed, and there should be education on the proper use of survey data for teaching assessment.
- SFU should review and expand awards for Teaching Excellence.
- The Centre for Educational Excellence, Faculty Relations, and the Associate Vice-President, Learning and Teaching should develop resources to support both faculty members and TPCs.

### Reconciliation

SFU’s Aboriginal Strategic Initiatives (ASI) are at the forefront of SFU’s commitment to implement responses to the recommendations of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission and of SFU’s Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee’s Walk this Path with Us Report and Calls to Action. A significant number of ASI-funded initiatives relate to development of new programs and courses, as well as incorporation of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum. The following are a few examples of some of the programs and initiatives which are underway/under development:

- The Indigenous Curriculum Resource Centre (ICRC), which will be located at the W.A.C. Bennett Library,
will be comprised of both a physical collection of resources to lend an online resource guide that will aggregate two kinds of digital resources: first, guides for instructors about Indigenizing curriculum and, secondly, a selection of resources appropriate for use as course texts, readings, etc., across subject areas. The physical ICRC collection will be organized using a modified Brian Deer Classification System.

- **The Ethical Foundations for Reconciliation** initiative began with the SFU Ethics Review Board, expressing interest in deepening understanding of Indigenous research. This led to a series of conversations with members of the Research Ethics Board, staff from the Office for Research Ethics, Indigenous Scholars, and members of the Indigenous Research Institute (IRI) on how Indigenous research is understood and held within SFU as well as what needs to change. IRI reached out to members of local Indigenous communities, focusing on what steps are needed to understand traditional Indigenous knowledge, ethics, and values, as well as perspectives of the Indigenous communities on what would be required to move into right relations.

- **The Decolonizing Teaching** project is an Integrated Seminar Series and Grants program that familiarizes program participants with the history and on-going impact of colonialism on Indigenous and settler Canadians and supports them as they design changes to their courses to ameliorate this impact. Each participant can access up to $6,000 to support and study the impact of the changes they make.

- **The Language Keeper’s** project is a multi-faceted strategy to stabilize and extend ongoing First Nations language revitalization outreach and community-based language instruction on and off campus. Its goal is to reinforce SFU’s participation in a BC framework agreement on standards for the acquisition of language fluency, and to continue in building articulation and transfer agreements with other post-secondary partners to open more pathways for Indigenous students to language degree completion.

**Challenge 3: Engagement**

*Strengthen the connection and collaborations between SFU and the world.*

SFU understands the critical importance of interacting with the world around it. The pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and engagement to address global challenges is core to SFU’s vision and is reflected in the Academic Plan.

The following initiatives look to build upon SFU’s tradition of mutually beneficial communities and to address major community issues through research, public engagement, and partnership. The goal is for students, faculty, and staff to become that much more engaged with local and global communities.

Below are a few examples of recent initiatives that support this challenge:

- **Knowledge Mobilization**
  A Knowledge Mobilization Hub has been established to focus on growing SFU’s culture of sharing knowledge and/or transferring it to end users in its communities. The Hub will provide services and supports to SFU researchers across all three campuses. [https://www.sfu.ca/research/strategic-initiatives/knowledge-mobilization](https://www.sfu.ca/research/strategic-initiatives/knowledge-mobilization)

- **Carnegie Engagement Classification**
  SFU is leading the Canadian pilot cohort (16 institutions) of the Carnegie Engagement Classification, which intends to support a process for institutional learning and transformation regarding engagement. The purpose is to enable the kind of transformational change that will position Canadian institutions as leaders in partnering with communities to co-create solutions to the world’s emerging complex challenges.
• **Work Integrated Learning (WIL)**
  Over 9,000 students participated in the SFU Co-op program in 2019, resulting in 4,100 work terms. The SFU WIL unit is planning to conduct a pan-institutional review of all WIL activities at SFU to create an inventory, to identify best practice, and to make recommendations on the development of new WIL programming.

**Challenge 4: Bridging Divides/Interdisciplinarity**

*Seek opportunities for research and teaching collaboration to advance defining themes of our times and to offer innovative academic credentials.*

Collaboration is an important underlying element of SFU’s vision. SFU feels it is essential to connect with academic and industry professionals across the globe. These connections help to drive and enhance advanced research and innovation. SFU currently has dual degrees and partnerships in place with many national and international institutions, professional associations, and companies. Furthermore, SFU continues to expand its close collaborative working relationships with BC post-secondary institutions and local school districts.

The Academic Plan is looking to build upon SFU’s current partnerships. The activities and initiatives emerging from the plan fully support and encourage SFU’s global reach and connections. From these collaborations, SFU will be looking to find ways of developing innovative and relevant new credentials that define our times and serve societal needs and expectations.

• **Accelerated Master’s**
  The Accelerated Master’s allows eligible students enrolled in a bachelor’s degree at SFU to take graduate courses and to count them toward their bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree. This is available to students in various disciplines. Further details can be found at: [https://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/future/academicprograms/AcceleratedMasters.html](https://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/future/academicprograms/AcceleratedMasters.html)

• **BC Graduate Scholarship (BCGS) program**
  The Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training provided SFU with $2,250,000 for a BC Graduate Scholarship (BCGS) program. In order to give greater support for the students who were granted this new scholarship, SFU provided each BCGS with an entrance award, valued at $5,000. SFU also designated eight of the scholarships for Indigenous students entering SFU; along with BCGS scholarships awarded through departments, 11% of the BCGS funding was awarded to Indigenous students, more than doubling the percentage mandated by the Ministry.
• Interdisciplinary Independent Studies program
The Interdisciplinary Independent Studies program, administered through Graduate and Post-Doctoral Studies, gives graduate students with uniquely interdisciplinary research projects a platform that allows them to study across disciplines and Faculties. This program also gives faculty members a nexus where their research interests can intersect and transform. This approach to interdisciplinarity, itself a strong aspect of the history of SFU, is recognized by the numerous national awards held by the students in the program, from Tri-Council doctoral awards to Trudeau Foundation Scholarships.

Challenge 5: Faculty and Staff Renewal

Ensure that academic hiring and career incentives advance excellence in scholarship and creativity, including the discovery of new knowledge and its application, the development of high-quality academic programming and teaching, support services, and engagement with the broader community.

SFU recognizes the imperative need to recruit and retain excellent faculty and staff and is committed to recruiting professionals who share in the philosophy of its vision. Furthermore, recruitment, hiring, and career incentives must anticipate and address the needs and priorities of tomorrow as well as advance SFU’s equity and diversity objectives.

Initiatives evolving from the Academic Plan will address the challenges associated with faculty and staff recruitment in a complex economic environment and a highly competitive post-secondary marketplace. Some of these activities are listed below:

• Faculty Renewal
Faculty renewal planning is designed to allow faculties to plan searches up to three years ahead. The Board of Governors approves a given number of positions and the Vice-President, Academic office approves the number of searches needed to meet the Board of Governors’ target.

For a number of years, the Vice-President, Academic has provided special funding to encourage the hiring of Indigenous faculty members across academic units.

• Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)
Equity, diversity and inclusion priorities have been set and include:
  o Engaging in a self-assessment/data-gathering on diversity and inclusion.
  o Developing more robust and equitable recruitment, retention, and career progression.
  o Increasing capacity and awareness of EDI opportunities.
  o Enhancing inclusion for everyone.

In partnership with the SFU Library, the EDI administrative group has put together an equity, diversity, and inclusion resource guide that can be accessed by all students, staff, and faculty. These resources include videos, infographics, guides, and scholarly materials to assist in understanding how to create an equitable, diverse, and healthy inclusive SFU community.

• Supervision for the 21st Century: Student Experience Initiative
The purpose of the Supervision for the 21st Century (S21C) project is to positively transform the supervisory relationship of SFU graduate students and faculty members by re-imagining the supervisory relationship within the frameworks of our 21st century educational context. Through research that scanned the landscape of supervision nationally and globally, as well as consultation driven by graduate students, the S21C project will culminate in training and critical discussions for faculty members as well as the creation of a comprehensive handbook for students.
CONCLUSION

As evidenced in the above, steady progress is being made across the five challenges identified in the Academic Plan. Some of the activities have been in place for some time, while others are just getting established, but all are contributing to meeting and addressing the challenges.

Many other activities are being initiated, funding is being allocated, structures are being developed, and tasks and responsibilities are being assigned, all in an effort to support the Academic Plan.

Each of the faculties and other support units are following their own plans, which are in support of and align with the Academic Plan. It is anticipated that a comprehensive review of achievements will be undertaken in 2022.

It is acknowledged that the impact of COVID-19 has created additional challenges for the institution, and SFU will have to adapt to the changing environment and perhaps review its priorities to accommodate students, faculty, and staff.