1) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Long-range planning does not deal with future decisions, but with the future of present decisions.”

Peter Drucker

As we shaped our five year plan, we contemplated “the future of present decisions” while ensuring that any present decisions are adaptable to changing circumstances.

In this context, the five year plan is focused on providing leadership and acting as a catalyst in creating opportunities and enabling individual graduate programs at SFU to adapt to the changing demands of graduate education in the global marketplace. We wish to advance SFU’s goal to be Canada’s most engaged research institution through diversity in graduate programs, and diversity in students while providing outstanding support to our community.

Key initiatives will be the promotion of outstanding programs (new and existing) aimed at attracting high quality students to SFU and providing an exceptional educational experience in both our regular programs and a new suite of programs geared towards working professionals, alumni and adult learners. An intentional goal will be the incorporation of professional skills, and work integrated learning opportunities into many graduate programs. Critical to the sustainability of our research activities are the recruitment, and intellectual and financial support of high quality students. The aims of our initiatives are to ensure that scholarship is the cornerstone of our programs, that outcome measures are a critical indicator of success, and that our collective decisions enable programs across the institution to further enrich their students’ academic, intellectual and social environments.

A number of information technology changes are planned that are geared towards providing responsive and responsible administration of the graduate enterprise. In addition, a re-structuring of academic program administration that would provide increased stewardship of the graduate enterprise is being contemplated.

2) CORE ACTIVITIES

Graduate Studies manage over 130 graduate programs across 50 plus academic units spread across 8 Faculties. These include graduate certificates, graduate diplomas, master and doctoral programs including joint degrees, co-tutelles, and special arrangement programs spread across practice-based, professional, non-thesis and thesis based programs including the online delivery of courses and programs. In the last academic year (2011-12), the annualized headcount was 4,224, and Graduate Studies processed 1657 new students registering for programs and provided oversight and disbursement of $16,214,000 worth of awards and scholarships. Graduate student success in tri-council competitions has improved by 15% (number of awards annually), total tri-council support for graduate students at SFU by 28% with an increasing number of our students receiving CGS awards ($35,000/yr) over the past 3 years. In addition,
we continue to see a number of our graduate students receiving prestigious national awards (Trudeau, Vanier, Banting).

Over the past academic plan (2010-13) Graduate Studies initiated and implemented substantive operational changes resulting in dramatic improvements in the processing of graduate student applications, admissions and award processes. In addition, through the re-allocation of internal resources and a modest expansion in staff, we improved our communications, and launched new initiatives to support Aboriginal and international students, thereby enhancing our student and community engagement. We have seen substantive improvements in student satisfaction with the quality of faculty supervision and we are building on success by initiating professional development for supervisors. Graduate Studies has addressed significant issues around the coordination of support for graduate students by developing excellent working relationships with various service providers across campus. Academically we have managed the rapid growth and increased complexity of graduate programs while developing the processes necessary to support new innovative programming. In this context, we have overseen the development of three international joint programs, an increasing number of co-tutelles, and the creation of frameworks for direct-entry graduate certificates and concurrent bachelor-masters programs, as well as concurrent and second credentials. Collectively, these accomplishments provide the basis for the next academic plan.

Graduate Studies (DGS) **CORE ACTIVITY** is the engaging of students, research and community in the support of excellence in graduate education. Fundamentally, the activities within Graduate Studies revolve around four themes: Operations, Benchmarking, Catalyst and Vision which are depicted below:
Graduate Studies activities include:

**Visioning**
- Establishes and articulates a vision and standards of academic excellence for graduate education, and advocates for high quality graduate education within and outside the university;
- Provides leadership in graduate academic policy and new graduate programming

**Catalysing**
- Facilitates and encourages a rich intellectual and social environment that enhances the quality of graduate education, in part through liaising with relevant service providers and individuals on campus to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive approach;
- Provides leadership and programming for professional skills development that enhance career options and encourage graduate students to contribute positively to their communities;
- Supports a culture of scholarly integrity and responsible conduct of research;
- Enhances interdisciplinary opportunities, creates aboriginal initiatives, and develops programs to support international student success.

**Operating**
- Provides responsive and responsible administration of graduate programs that is transparent, consistent and equitable;
- Administers and disburses all internal scholarship and awards, and adjudicates external award programs and disbursing these funds;
- Provides superior service to the graduate community, with activities and support programs for graduate students, faculty and staff;
- Provides advice, information, networking, and assistance to graduate students and graduate program staff.

**Benchmarking**
- Participates in academic program reviews providing quality assurance oversight in an institutional context.
- Establish outcome measures for the assessment of graduate program performance that are program-tailored.
- Initiates disciplinary comparisons of program performance both within SFU and nationally.
- Work with Institutional Research and Planning on the collection of graduate analytic information including institutional surveys (Supervisory and Exit) as well as national surveys (Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey).

In addition to the core activities, Graduate Studies has responsibilities for supporting and ensuring excellence in Special Arrangement Graduate Programs (Individual and Cohort), postdoctoral education, the SFU President’s Dream Colloquium, and undergraduate research trainees through the VPR and NSERC USRA (Undergraduate Student Research Awards) programs. While much of the day-to-day activity is performed in the departments that administer graduate programs with support from Graduate Studies, academic policy, and program development is managed through the Dean’s role as Chair of the Senate Graduate Studies Committee, and as a member of the Senate Committee on University Priorities, the Senate Committee on Enrolment Management Planning, and Senate. Oversight of awards is provided by the Dean in the capacity as Chair of Senate Graduate Awards Adjudication Committee and in the role as a member of the Senate Policy Committee on Scholarships, Awards and Bursaries.
3) PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS
In developing its contribution to the Academic Plan 2013-2018, Graduate Studies made the following assumptions:

- That SFU has more graduate students than are funded by the provincial grant (~1250 FTE) which limits its ability to develop new graduate programming that is not cost-recovery;
- Strategic graduate enrolment management will be implemented to address the issues of managing graduate student expansion and the nature of graduate programming at SFU such that it aligns with institutional priorities;
- That SFU will continue to diversify its graduate student body and programming to address the changing demographics and landscape of graduate education. This will include increases in specialized programs, online graduate education, joint programming, and non-traditional course delivery using blended delivery models, weekend courses and short intensive courses;
- A high priority will continue to be placed on increasing the financial support available to graduate students but the ability of SFU to meet these needs is limited thus necessitating a re-allocation of resources in alignment with the vision of the institution;
- That in striving for excellence in graduate education, Graduate Studies will continue to balance the needs for streamlined and transparent central planning and administration with autonomy at the individual graduate program level;
- That major gains in operational efficiencies in the management of graduate records and award programs can only be further realized through significant investments in IT resources.

4) STRATEGIC INFLUENCES
Graduate Studies brings a unique pan-university perspective to its central purpose of promoting excellence in graduate education through its four roles – visionary, catalyst, operator and benchmarker. In all of these functions – from providing leadership, envisioning new innovative programs and encouraging student engagement to maintaining high quality graduate education, administration and services -- Graduate Studies brings individual program autonomy within distinct faculties into alignment with institutional goals that are informed by emerging local, national and global developments in graduate education. As an institution focused on engaging students there is tremendous opportunity for Graduate Studies to provide leadership in developing strategies that will enhance the graduate student experience, improve graduate program outcomes, address graduate student financial support issues, engage aboriginal and international students, and provide training that will enhance graduate students career preparation. To further engage our community, Graduate Studies has the opportunity to work with individual academic units to enhance existing programs, or create new programs some of which must be geared to working professionals, alumni and adult learners. There is considerable opportunity to create more engagement of individual graduate programs in the management of the SFU graduate enterprise and to impart more structure to the supportive and leadership role of Graduate Studies. We have the opportunity to commit resources and expertise to support the research and career aspirations of our postdoctoral fellows (PDFs) with a goal of enriching their experience at SFU and preparing them for their future careers. Working collaboratively with Institutional Research and Planning, Graduate Studies has the opportunity to produce specific issue-based quantitative studies in support of strategic priorities of the institution, conduct mixed-methods studies aimed at better understanding the graduate student experience, and produce reports to enable institutional and national benchmarking, and comparative analysis.

The challenge for the graduate enterprise at SFU is finding ways to set SFU apart from other institutions (provincially, nationally and globally) in an increasingly competitive marketplace that makes it extremely difficult to attract quality graduate students. Failure to meet this challenge will affect our institutional reputation and research agenda. This challenge is compounded by inadequate provincial
funding for graduate students, our proximity to another large research-intensive institution, our internal financial constraints, and the increased professional graduate credentials being offered by other post-secondary institutions globally. Collectively these challenges will affect SFU’s ability to be Canada’s most engaged research university.

Institution-wide enrolment management for graduate students is necessary because of graduate student base-funding shortfalls. As a consequence we must ensure that financial support for graduate students aligns with institution priorities and continue to demand that appropriate business cases exist for expansion of programming.

In light of these opportunities and challenges, SFU must develop a clear vision statement for the role and nature of graduate education where the value and importance of graduate education is fully acknowledged as something fundamental not only to research excellence, but to the preparation of future generation of scholars, scientists, educators, artists, professionals and global citizens.

5) SELF ASSESSMENT
Graduate Studies possesses experienced, knowledgeable and committed staff and has recently increased our capacity in communications and international expertise. Academic units appreciate our student-centered facilitative administrative structure. In terms of academic planning and administration, the senior administration has in excess of 20 years experience managing graduate programs and has the support of the collective wisdom of SGSC. Graduate Studies has developed outstanding working relationships with Student Services, Institutional Research and Planning, the Graduate Student Society, Lifelong Learning, the Library Research Commons, Career Services, Work-Integrated Learning, and the Teaching and Learning Centre. The staff within the Office of Graduate Studies has increasing strengths in Information Technology (IT) and have integrated processes for Continuous Improvement planning and implementation in their operational practices. This has led to substantial enhancements in administrative efficiencies within academic units and our office.

The main weakness is that the SFU Administrative structure for Graduate Studies limits its perceived importance and visibility with its authority correspondingly limited and subject to erosion. A lack of clear policy or mechanisms for our office to promote best practices limits our ability to ensure excellence in graduate education. In terms of staffing, Graduate Studies has limited capacity to manage professional skills programming for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

6) EFFICIENCIES
An administrative processes review of Graduate Studies was completed by Edge Training and Consulting for Finance upon the request of the Dean of Graduate Studies in 2012. With a few minor exceptions, they identified technology opportunities in the areas of document management, award disbursements, student applications and thesis management activities as critical to improving efficiency. The following technology improvements will be implemented over the next few years.

- Grad OASIS – an online admission and evaluation system
- Grad APR – an online annual progress review system
- GA’S - an online graduate awards application and adjudication system
- Grad EDMS – an electronic document management system
- Grad eThesis – an electronic thesis submission and approval system
- Grad Analytics – an institution based reporting database for graduate program reviews

7) GRADUATE STUDIES OBJECTIVES
Graduate Studies ongoing objectives include: encouraging the development of high quality programs; providing incentives for the recruitment of the best students; encouraging the creation of programs in areas of strategic importance; advocating for increased graduate funding; supporting our postdoctoral fellows, and maintaining efficient and fair graduate policies and procedures. Our highest priority over the next five years will be the development of programs and practices that improve program outcomes leading to an enhanced graduate student experience while establishing flexible programming options, and an administrative structure that engages the community in promoting excellence in graduate education. Further priorities will be increasing the diversity of programs, initiatives in support of aboriginal student recruitment and engagement, and enhanced support for international students. The specific objectives are outlined and aimed at supporting the institutional goals outlined in the vision of SFU (see below).

**Institutional Goals**

**GOAL 1:** To equip students with the knowledge, skills and experiences to prepare them for life in an ever-changing and challenging world.

**GOAL 2:** To be a world leader in knowledge mobilization, building on a strong foundation of fundamental research.

**GOAL 3:** To be Canada’s most community-engaged research university.

To assist in achieving these goals, the **VPA academic plan** outlined the following main objectives: enhancing the quality of education and student satisfaction; improve support for students; contribute to research excellence; and increase community engagement activity.

In the context of the Academic Plans objectives, surveys of graduate students, while demonstrating a large degree of satisfaction with their SFU experience, want to have more career training and support, a greater diversity of programs, enhanced financial support, clear program outcomes and high quality supervision. The relative need for improvement in each of these areas varies across our research-intensive and professional/career-oriented programs. The specific objectives of Graduate Studies are designed to support the VPA Academic Plan and the goals of the institution. Specifically the objectives are:

1) **Enhance graduate student supervision and professional skills training.**

- **Provide increased support for instituting best practices in supervision.**
  Graduate Studies will enhance graduate supervision through the establishment of discipline-specific supervisory practices, professional development for supervisors, assessment of supervision, and initiating formal processes for the investigation of allegations of supervisor misconduct.

- **Implement professional skills training for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.**
  As an institution focused on engaging students, research and community there is tremendous opportunity to create an institutional culture that values career and professional development for its graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Institutional benefits that accrue from programs and practices that promote professional development include better employability for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows; an enhanced position in the marketplace for the institution; stronger institutional ties with industry, community partners, strategic partners, and alumni. Graduate Studies will coordinate the many partners across the institution providing professional skills programming and implement new workshops leading to a non-credit graduate certificate.

- **Implement graduate practices and policies geared to program outcomes.**
  Graduate Studies will address factors related to program structure, practices and regulations as well as the culture of graduate education in some disciplines that lead to long times to degree completion. We will work with academic units and graduate students to articulate student-centred...
learning outcomes for graduate education at SFU considering such factors as: career outcomes and placements, program satisfaction, student scholarship, quality of supervision/mentorship as well as standard graduation metrics.

2) Facilitate the expansion of new and existing programs particularly those geared to working professionals, alumni and adult learners.

- **Enable research-intensive programs to enhance their academic and intellectual environments.**
  The graduate enterprise at SFU is dominated by students in research-intensive graduate programs and maintaining support for and finding mechanisms to allow quality programs to expand and innovate is essential. Graduate Studies will continue to invest significant resources into programs and services aimed at enhancing success in external scholarship competitions, assisting in recruitment efforts, promoting best practices and academic integrity. In terms of academic integrity, Graduate Studies will take a leadership role in Responsible Conduct of Research programming for graduate students working collaboratively with the Office for Research Ethics and the VPR.

- **More effective use of graduate funding.**
  One of the main factors affecting graduate education at SFU is the limited financial support available for students from external (particularly the province), and internal sources. While we have the opportunity to lobby the provincial government for more financial support and to make graduate student funding a priority for SFU Advancement, we have limited financial capability within SFU to increase support for graduate students. Given the shortfall in provincial graduate funding and the institution’s fiscal situation, we must evaluate how we use existing funding. Of note, Senate Graduate Studies Committee has stated that guaranteed funding for students in research-intensive graduate programs is a priority particularly for PhD students who make long-term commitments to their education and the research enterprise of SFU.

- **Implement strategic enrolment management aligned to institutional priorities.**
  SFU’s graduate student numbers and program complexity has increased dramatically over the past decade reacting to fiscal opportunities, growth in faculty complement, Faculty re-structuring, expansion in Surrey, and to meet changing disciplinary norms in graduate education. This has resulted in SFU having a large graduate student population with one in three students for which SFU receives no provincial funding. The net effect of this is that new programming is discouraged in academic units that cannot charge fees that are cost-recovery. Graduate Studies will work with the VPA and Faculty Deans to manage strategically its graduate programs and enrolments within a well-articulated internal budgeting scenario that aligns with institutional priorities.

- **Increase the number of graduate certificates and experiential learning in programs.**
  The creation of direct entry graduate certificates and formalization of laddering from graduate certificates and diplomas into masters degrees has created a large opportunity for SFU to expand its limited offerings of graduate programs geared to working professionals, alumni and adult learners through online, blended and traditional pedagogy. Graduate Studies will encourage the creation of direct entry graduate certificates, the embedding of integrated learning opportunities (practicums, co-op, and internships) into graduate programs, and the laddering of non-credit courses into credit credentials. These types of programs will align with our commitment to engage community and are intended to create revenue streams for the institution and academic units.

- **Increase the number of joint programs.**
  Graduate Studies will promote the development of internal joint programs between career and research-intensive programs (or alternatively to add specific career-focused courses to research-intensive programs), increases in interdisciplinary programs, as well as promoting an increase in
cross-institutional joint programs. We can consider leveraging programs at other post-secondary institutions that have a technology focus to either embed some applied/technical aspects into our programs or alternatively to create a joint program that could include a certificate from the partner institution.

3) Develop practices and policies aimed at supporting aboriginal and international students.

- **Increase aboriginal graduate student recruitment and engagement.**
  To accomplish this we need to increase our proactive outreach to prospective aboriginal students, develop improved academic support resources for aboriginal students, work with graduate programs to adopt a proactive and supportive stance towards aboriginal students, and showcase aboriginal scholarship and research. Graduate Studies will develop initiatives through consultation with the Office of Aboriginal Peoples, the Indigenous Research Institute, and the Indigenous Student Centre and with community partners to support aboriginal graduate student recruitment and engagement.

- **Increase support for international joint programs and international students.**
  Graduate Studies will promote the development of international joint programs and the expansion of support available for international graduate students including an expansion of professional skills training geared specifically to international students, increases in co-op and practicums designed to enhance career opportunities post-graduation, and the development of programs designed to better prepare international students for graduate study at SFU (particularly for students with the academic qualifications but lacking some of the English Language preparation).

4) Enhance the administration of the graduate enterprise.

- **Initiate the creation of a Faculty and Graduate Council.**
  We plan to push for the creation of a Faculty of Graduate Studies, as recommended by the external review of Graduate Studies, with the creation of a Graduate Council to create more engagement of individual graduate programs in the management of the SFU graduate enterprise and to impart more structure to the supportive and leadership role played by Graduate Studies. This would formalize the Graduate Chairs meetings and allow the creation of associated subcommittees to improve communication and decision making. The Council would review practices and policies for the purpose of making recommendations to Senate Graduate Studies Committee which would still be the main governing body (next to Senate) for managing graduate academic policies, programs and general regulations. It would have responsibility of appointing faculty members and other suitably qualified individuals to the Faculty allowing them to supervise graduate students. Providing such a structure may make graduate program chairs feel less on their own in dealing with program/student issues and would allow Graduate Studies to explore mechanisms of compensating the Graduate Chairs in a structured way for their commitment possibly addressing the issue of revolving Graduate Chairs in some programs.

- **Implement IT solutions in graduate program management.**
  We have the opportunity to utilize Information Technology to enhance the admission process and award processes institution-wide, to improve the graduate student annual progress review process, to create an electronic doctoral examination process, and to manage documents and workflow. Graduate Studies will as part of its Continual Improvement Plan, commit significant financial and personnel resources to address workload and the management of graduate program activities via IT solutions.

- **Ensure that high academic standards and rigorous processes are followed.**
  We have observed some slippage in academic rigor associated with the examination and thesis process over the years. In addition, what constitutes a thesis and what distinguishes a thesis from an extended essay in some disciplines needs clarification. We must also adapt our thesis
submission and review processes to the digital age. Graduate Studies will engage with the community to develop practices and policies related to examinations. We will monitor adherence to these policies to ensure that academic standards are maintained.

- **Improve quality assurance metrics.**
  Working collaboratively with Institutional Research and Planning, and the academic units, Graduate Studies will produce specific issue-based quantitative studies in support of strategic priorities of the institution, conduct studies aimed at better understanding the graduate student experience, and produce reports to enable institutional, and national benchmarking and comparative analysis.

Graduate Studies objectives align well with the objectives and associated activities included in the VPA Academic Plan (2013-18). Specifically in **AP Objective 1.1(Enhance the quality of education and student satisfaction)** Graduate Studies objectives support: learning outcomes and their assessment; experiential learning opportunities; enhancing graduate supervision; effective use of graduate funding; and programs for mature, returning and non-traditional students. In **AP Objective 1.2(Improve support for students)** Graduate Studies objectives support: improving support for EAL students; improving access for under-represented groups; and encouraging community-building in academic units. In **AP Objective 2.1(Contribute to research excellence)** Graduate Studies objectives support: ensuring students are involved in research. In **AP Objective 3.1(Increase community engagement activity)** Graduate Studies objectives support: increasing alumni engagement in graduate education; create new links and opportunities for under-served communities; and forging new institutional partnerships and opportunities.

8) **POSSIBLE LONG-TERM GROWTH SCENARIOS**
Long-term growth of existing graduate programs is compromised by the fiscal realities facing the institution as a result of inadequate provincial support for graduate student education. Thus, the creation of new specialty programs geared to working professionals, alumni and adult learners on a cost recovery basis is essential to the long-term growth of graduate programming at SFU unless existing graduate specialty programs are removed from the provincial base funding reporting entity and allowed to adjust tuition. Collectively, new revenue generation is essential if we wish to adequately support existing programs and consider new research-intensive graduate programs.

9) **COMMUNICATION**
The plan was developed following consultation across the graduate programs and the Graduate Student Society over the past 18 months, building on plans submitted by the Associate Deans, Directors and senior APSA staff in Graduate Studies. The submitted version was reviewed by the Associate Deans (Graduate Studies) and Directors in Graduate Studies. The final version will be shared with all staff in the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies, Senate Graduate Studies Committee, individual Graduate Program Chairs, the Graduate Student Society, and communicated to the wider community via our website.