MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION: SFU Community
FROM: Jonathan Driver
RE: Report of Committee to Review EAL Supports and Services

DATE: January 5, 2012
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Introduction
In fall 2010 I formed a review committee with terms of reference to report on the adequacy of our support for students for whom English is an additional language (EAL). The terms of reference and the committee’s report and recommendations are available on the VPA website at http://www.sfu.ca/vpacademic/committees_taskforces/Ad_Hoc_Committees.html Following receipt of the committee report, I requested feedback from Senate on the recommendations, and on the next steps outlined below. I am now seeking comments from the SFU community on the report and on the proposed next steps outlined here. Please submit comments to eal_report@sfu.ca by February 15, 2012. Nominations for membership on a standing committee may also be sent to that email address.

Although we do not know the exact number of EAL students at SFU, a data gap that the review report identifies, it would not be surprising to find that 50% fall into this category. Concerns about the English language abilities of students (not all of whom are EAL) have been brought to my attention regularly by instructors and students. Both domestic and international students may have difficulties with English language, and both graduate and undergraduate students need assistance. I therefore believe that we should focus on better support for language development for all SFU students, and not conceptualize this as a problem that is confined to international undergraduate students.

The remainder of this document sets out some principles for SFU to follow with regard to EAL support, and defines short-term and long-term action plans. I support the overarching approach of the report that identifies a need for ongoing and systematic work at SFU to improve EAL Services and supports. The principles and recommendations have been reviewed and modified by the deans, by SCUP and by Senate.

Principles for English language support
Following Recommendation 13 of the committee, a useful first step is to establish a set of principles. The following principles are modeled on Appendix C of the committee’s report.

1. With the exception of a few specialized programs, the language of instruction at SFU is English, and graduates of SFU degree and diploma programs should have the language skills needed for more advanced study and/or employment in an English-speaking environment.
2. A multi-lingual campus community enhances the academic and cultural life of SFU, and we support opportunities for people from different cultural/linguistic background to contribute to and participate fully in the diversity of campus life. This includes providing opportunities for native English speakers to develop cross-cultural competencies.
3. SFU is responsible for ensuring that students are sufficiently competent in English at the start of their program to allow them to participate fully in their studies.
4. Students for whom English is an additional language and who seek to improve their English are responsible for continuing to develop their English language proficiency throughout their programs by
taking appropriate credit and non-credit courses, and are encouraged to use English in non-academic situations.

5. Support for EAL and other students should include a broad range of academic skills and acculturation opportunities, not just English language skills improvement.

6. The need for appropriate language support is addressed early in a student’s career, and the options for support at all levels are clearly outlined to students and their advisors.

7. Students are encouraged and supported to enhance their English language skills development through practice, to use English during all aspects of their studies at SFU, including activities such as group work, in-class discussions, field schools, faculty/student interactions, and graduate supervision.

8. SFU regularly evaluates the efficacy and outcomes of its English language support, and is committed to developing new approaches to this.

9. Provision of some English language support may require the University to levy a separate fee for non-credit programs.

Immediate actions
The report notes that development of adequate language support is complex, and it is likely that the needs of students will change over time. It also notes that difficulty with language may be one of a number of interrelated factors that international students in particular may face, and some support programs may have to incorporate other assistance. The proposed immediate actions are designed to build a stable structure for further development.

1. Establish a group with responsibility for monitoring and improving EAL support.
   I concur with the report’s Recommendation 11 that a small group with responsibility for coordinating and overseeing EAL support will yield faster results than a drastic re-structuring of current programs. I suggest that the standing committee be chaired and resourced by the Director, University Curriculum. The terms of reference and membership will be established in a later document.

2. Following Recommendations 2, 3, and 4, the Associate VP Students should conduct a review of the English proficiency required for admission to SFU, the process for directing non-admissible students to preparatory programs, and the process for directed admitted students to appropriate support programs.

3. The EAL steering committee should produce a document and website that outlines in a clear and comprehensive manner all of the services currently available for EAL students. There should be an accompanying piece that provides guidance to instructors and staff on how to advise EAL students who are having difficulties.

4. Following Recommendations 8 and 9 the Teaching and Learning Centre should consult with the EAL coordinating committee about provision of programs to assist departments incorporate English practice and proficiency into curricula, as well as programs to assist instructors and TAs who work with EAL students or with native English speaking students who may have language challenges, and instructors and TAs who are themselves EAL speakers.

5. It would be very useful to build a question about a student’s language background into the new course and instructor evaluations that SCUTL will be developing over the next year.

6. The Director, University Curriculum, should initiate a review of the Foundations of Academic Literacy program (FAL). This should include an assessment of the benefits of the program to students, the need to expand course offerings, the possibility of courses focused on disciplinary writing styles, the need for graduate level FAL courses, the need for new courses to “bridge” students to writing-intensive courses, and the question of additive versus integral credit for FAL courses.

Long-term actions
1. The EAL coordinating committee should conduct a gap analysis of SFU’s support for EAL students, and make recommendations for new programs (Recommendations 5, 6).

2. The EAL coordinating committee should monitor the effectiveness of various support programs and processes on a regular basis (Recommendations 10, 12).

3. The EAL coordinating committee should examine the role that Writing intensive courses play in the development of language abilities in EAL students, and integrate the W criteria and aims into EAL projects when appropriate.

4. The EAL coordinating committee should inform itself of emerging issues with regard to EAL support, and make appropriate recommendations for action.
Resources and other issues
A number of recommendations deal with resources. The budget of the Vice-President, Academic has many competing demands. The VPA will commit some funds from the revenues received from Fraser International College to enhancing EAL support. However, as with other non-credit support programs, some new initiatives will require that students pay a fee for EAL programming.

The report also recommends that SFU should develop a more comprehensive plan for internationalization; although this recommendation is outside the mandate of the committee, I can report that preparations are underway to do this under the supervision of the Vice-President External Relations.