Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

An Initial Candidacy Evaluation Committee Report

Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, British Columbia
Canada

October 12-14, 2011

A Confidential Report Prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities that Represents the Views of the Evaluation Committee
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**EVALUATION COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

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*Dr. Sandra Elman (ex officio)*
Simon Fraser University
Evaluation Report

INTRODUCTION

On October 12-14, 2011 a seven-member Evaluation Committee representing the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) visited Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia to assess the University for Initial Candidacy for accreditation. Committee members arrived on campus having read the institution’s self-study and participated in an introductory meeting at which initial impressions were shared and topics for further investigation were identified. Over the next two days committee members examined exhibits and supporting documents; conducted numerous individual interviews; and participated in several meetings with faculty, staff, students, and administrators. This report contains the findings that resulted from that intensive and thorough examination of the University.

The Committee extends deep appreciation for the hospitality shown by the University community before and during the visit. The University personnel responsible for preparations and logistics made certain that the committee had all the support and access to information necessary for the completion of its work.

Institutional History

Simon Fraser University (SFU) was created in 1963 by the government of British Columbia to relieve enrollment pressures on the University of British Columbia. Although the initial mandate for SFU was to provide basic programs in the arts and sciences and in teacher preparation, by the time it opened its doors in 1965 its 2,500 students were enrolled in programs ranging from baccalaureate to Ph.D. Today SFU is British Columbia’s second-largest research university with three campuses in the vicinity of Vancouver, enrolling approximately 35,000 students in academic programs in addition to those enrolled in non-credit programs.

SFU’s culture was, and to a large extent still is, greatly impacted by the cultural turmoil at the time of its establishment in the mid-1960’s. The university initially attracted a number of faculty who were just beginning their academic careers, and they brought with them an idealism and desire for innovation that established an environment of boldness and willingness to try new ideas and approaches to higher education. While nearly all members of that initial faculty cadre have now retired, the institution has retained its tradition of innovation.

Recent Accreditation History

Simon Fraser University’s application for Initial Candidacy was approved by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities in January, 2009.
Eligibility Requirements

The evaluators found that Simon Fraser University’s practices conform to the spirit of the NWCCU Eligibility Requirements (ERs). However, the evaluators also find that the University needs to make additional progress with regard to ERs #3, 11, and 22. These three ERs address two issues:

1) SFU’s mission and core themes have not been formally adopted by its Board of Governors (ER 3).

   Status: Although in 2000 the Board of Governors formally adopted a Values and Commitment statement that served as an institutional mission statement until 2010, the entire text of the Mission Statement used in the institution’s self evaluation has not been formally adopted by the board. However, discussions between two of the evaluators and two of the members of the Board of Governors made it clear that the board is both informed and supportive of the mission statement and core themes used in the institutional self evaluation. At the time of the evaluators’ campus visit a comprehensive, highly participatory visioning process had produced a draft strategic vision document which has been presented to the University Senate and which is anticipated to gain formal Board of Governors approval by the end of November, 2011. This vision statement will encompass most, if not all, of the elements of Eligibility Requirement 3.

2) SFU does not have clearly identified student learning outcomes and associated validation of student achievements for all of its programs (ERs 11 and 22).

   Status: A key finding of the institution’s self evaluation process is the need for SFU to develop student learning outcomes for its degree programs and general education requirements (WQB = writing, quantitative, breadth) and to complete the loop of assessment and improvement. The institutional commitment to this goal is found in the Academic Plan 2010-2013.

Self Evaluation

The evaluators found the Simon Fraser University self evaluation report to be well-written and well-organized. The institution’s self-assessment was candid, thorough and honest about gaps in planning, assessment, and data. The self-study clearly described themes, objectives, indicators and the process of assessing theme-related performance. However, the evaluators also discovered some shortcomings in the document. In some cases, especially in the case of the Student Experience and Success theme, the rationale for selection of indicators was missing. Although the Executive Summary discussed a variety of strengths and weaknesses within the institution, it did not include a clear summary of institutional strengths and weaknesses. Finally, and perhaps most troublesome for the evaluators, there was a lack of clarity about the exact wording and status of the institution’s mission statement.
Standard One—Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

1.A Mission

At the time of the evaluation team’s site visit, Simon Fraser University’s Mission Statement was in a state of flux. The mission statement upon which the institution’s self-evaluation is based consists of two pieces: 1) a Statement on Values and Commitments, which was endorsed by the University Senate and approved by the Board of Governors in 2000 and 2) an additional generic “Preliminary Mission Statement” approved by the (former) president and vice presidents in 2010. However, a visioning process, envision>SFU, that engaged administrators, faculty, students, and community constituents was approaching its culmination. The President and Vice President Academic anticipated that by the end of November the University Senate would have approved envision>SFU and the Board of Governors would have formally adopted it. The administrators of the university anticipate that the vision statement, once it is formally adopted, will also become SFU’s mission statement, resulting in a change of the wording of the mission statement but little change in its overall thrust.

1.B Core Themes

The institution has identified four themes that collectively encompass its mission; and objectives, outcomes and indicators have been identified for each theme. However, in some cases (e.g., Teaching and Learning Core Theme, Objective 1; Research Theme, Objective 2; Community and Citizenship Core Theme, Objective 2) the distinction between objectives and strategies is not clear. An even more serious shortcoming is an apparent lack of focus on a manageable set of meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators (see for example, pages 193, 205 and 209 of the self-study document; Standard 1.B.2).

The four themes of the institutional self evaluation overlap but are not identical to the three components of the strategic vision that has resulted from the envision>SFU process. The administrative leaders of SFU anticipate that soon after the vision statement has been adopted by the Board of Governors the themes in the self study and the components of the strategic vision will be brought into congruence. That congruence appears to be essential to institutional efforts to develop a single, clearly understood mission statement (Standard 1.A.1).

Compliment:
The committee compliments Simon Fraser University for the comprehensive, highly participatory envision>SFU process as well as the clarity and significance of the resulting vision statement and document.

Concern:
At present SFU does not have a single, clearly understood mission statement and a single set of well understood institutional themes with associated outcomes and verifiable indicators of achievement (1.A.1; 1.B.1; 1.B.2).
Standard Two—Resources and Capacity

2.A Governance

Simon Fraser University has a system of governance that is clearly defined in British Columbia’s provincial University Act, which was amended to create SFU in 1963. Faculty, staff, students and administrators have well understood opportunities for proper consideration of their views, especially through their representation on the Board of Governors and University Senate. The Board of Governors meets regularly and is impressively engaged in its oversight of the University. It has in place well-established and rigorous procedures for annual evaluation of the President and regular evaluation of its own performance.

As specified by provincial statutes, SFU has both a Chancellor and a President. The Chancellor, who is a member of both the Board of Governors and the University Senate, is not a university employee. The Chancellor’s position is one of influence within the university and, perhaps more importantly, one with considerable expectations for external representation and promotion of the institution. The President, who is Chair of the University Senate and an ex officio member of the Board of Governors, is the chief executive officer of the institution. The roles and responsibilities of these two officers are clearly delineated and well understood within the institution.

As a well-established and reputable institution, SFU has a comprehensive, clearly articulated, and easily accessible set of policies covering students, faculty, staff, and institutional practices. Probably the only item of particular note is the University’s agreement with Navitas Educational Ltd. to operate Fraser International College (FIC). A clearly written contract specifies that FIC will offer a set of SFU-specific lower-division courses, English language instruction, and other supplemental instruction to international students recruited by FIC. FIC’s programs are structured to facilitate the transfer of appropriate students to SFU, but there is neither a requirement that the students choose SFU nor one that SFU admits unqualified FIC students. SFU’s commitment to academic freedom is legendary. Its Statement on Values and Commitments, presently a part of the Mission Statement, opens with, “We are an open, inclusive university whose foundation is intellectual and academic freedom.” The reality of this commitment is supported by statements in a number of SFU policies and documents as well as the testimonies of a variety of faculty, staff, and administrators interviewed by members of the committee.

Standard 2.B Human Resources

The institution has well documented and published policies and procedures related to the employment, supervision, and evaluation of staff and faculty. Staff members are evaluated regularly and in compliance with union contracts. Tenured, tenure track, and regular (continuing) teaching faculty are evaluated regularly and in alignment with a merit based salary system. Faculty promotion and tenure decisions are based upon a well-defined review process that includes evaluation by peers both within and external to SFU.
Review of policy and interviews with professional staff indicate that the institution provides more than adequate resources for professional development, including monetary and tuition opportunities. The University maintains the appropriate number of faculty to meet the institution’s stated educational objectives; and workloads for faculty appropriately balance research, scholarship and teaching.

**Standard 2.C Education Resources**

While external program review provides a process to assure that programs are evaluated by peers and compared to national norms, most programs lack clearly identified student learning outcomes (2.C.1). The institution does not adequately publish expected course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Except for a few professionally accredited programs and a scattered number of other courses, student learning outcomes are not included on the course outlines that are posted on the web for students to access. While the course syllabi provided to the students at the beginning of each course may be more detailed than those posted on the SFU website, there is no mechanism to ensure that a particular course has similar student outcomes regardless of who teaches it and that those outcomes are available in writing to all students (2.C.2).

While it appears that substantial learning is occurring at SFU, much assessment of student learning, whether on-line or face-to-face, is attributed to the ability of students to earn suitable grades and the impressions of learning formed by faculty and external peer reviewers. Generally accepted student learning outcomes in course and programs, as well as direct measures of such, are rare. Some interviewed faculty members believe that the external review process is rigorous and that it provides sufficient evidence, without the use of explicit student learning outcomes, that the curriculum, compared to peer institutions, is adequate in leading students to degree completion. Except for a lack of culture of assessment at SFU, the curriculum processes are faculty-driven, bottom-up, inclusive, and appropriate. Faculty are to be complimented on their active involvement in the curriculum process. Several layers of academic review occur before degree programs and new courses are approved and offered.

While not identified specifically as General Education, the WQB (Writing, Quantitative, Breadth) undergraduate program (i.e., a set of courses) is of sufficient size and scope to be considered a core of general education. Courses are approved for WQB status through a faculty-driven process. This distribution model is appreciated by some students because of the latitude in the choice of courses, but to paraphrase one student leader, “What student would care if the reasons for these requirements were explained to them as freshmen?” The current approach to satisfying general education requirements appears to be a check-off list as opposed to an integrated course of study with clearly defined objectives (2.C.9). This institution has multiple, overlapping statements of what it hopes students will learn before they graduate. In addition to the WQB program, the *Task Force on Teaching & Learning: Final Report*, the Academic Plan, the Core Themes, and the *envision>SFU* document contain
objectives/goals for students. There should be consistency in, agreement on, and assessment of what the institution articulates as its expectations for all undergraduates. Graduate enrollment at SFU has experienced strong growth in recent years, and the percent of applicants admitted has remained steady around 45%, leading to highly qualified graduate students. Appropriate rigor of graduate courses is ensured through the graduate studies committees at the faculty and senate levels. Only tenured and tenure-track faculty are allowed to chair graduate committees, although other faculty can serve as co-supervisors. Consistent with the evaluators’ commendation on the use of external reviews, doctoral committees include an examiner from outside SFU.

Up to one-half of the departmental degree requirements for a graduate program may be completed at another institution. This allows students to customize their programs to include areas of study that may not be available at SFU. This student-centered policy is to be complimented. Graduate committees review and make decisions on any courses, internships, or clinical practices that will be accepted as part of a graduate program. SFU’s continuing education and non-academic-credit programs are exemplary and are to be congratulated in reaching their 40-year milestone of extending learning to the many that benefit from this outreach effort. The presence of continuing education helps the university better align with its goal and core theme of community engagement. The quality of these programs (e.g., management and professional, seniors, city, writing and publishing, interpretation and translation, English language and culture, interdisciplinary, community education, continuing studies in science and environment), units (e.g., Centre for Online and Distance Education, Centre for Integrated and Credit Studies, Office of International Development), and their current leadership are among the strengths of this institution.

Furthermore, the breadth and depth of community outreach efforts are distributed across the entire institution, not just limited to those administered through the recently created Lifelong Learning Unit. Each of the major SFU campuses (Surrey, Vancouver, and Burnaby) provides venues for credit and non-credit offerings suited to community interests. The roles of faculty, community/business partners, and the University Senate in establishing, advising, and evaluating these programs is well established. The utilization of university space, especially evenings and weekends, for continuing education enhances the impact this university has on students and communities. Furthermore, as required by accreditation standards, the enrollment management office retains participation records for many years beyond the attendance of participants for all certificate and diploma programs, and for most other programs, except the Philosopher’s Café—the informal community lectures held throughout the community.

The Center for Online and Distance Education and SFUNow programs are positioned to deliver learning in a way increasingly sought after by students, embraced by other universities, and fostered by institutions seeking to leverage scarce resources. However, the lack of university strategy for this initiative, the decision to restrict SFUNow offerings to less than 10 percent of available courses in an academic area, the happenstance manner in which courses are selected for development and delivery, the uneven participation by the different Faculties, the excessive use of tutor markers for teaching courses after their development by professors, and the prevailing business model which constrains future growth all point to the need for further discussion and evaluation by the university. The timing to further consider opportunities
available through online and distance education seems right as technological developments enable higher quality instruction and the university seeks to expand access to more students in the community, including those in remote and isolated regions.

Standard 2.D Student Support Resources

The institution provides a breadth of resources to support student learning. Classrooms and instructional spaces are well equipped across all three campuses.

The institution strives to provide a safe and secure environment. Despite the urban settings, both the Surrey and Vancouver campuses have low incidents of on-campus crime, at least in part due to their good working relationships with local law enforcement officials and landlords to ensure the safety of students. The institution meets all provincial requirements for reporting on student safety.

The institution recruits and admits students who demonstrate high academic achievement. Reporting lines of recruiting/admission functions and advising functions within the portfolio of the Associate Vice President—Students has created good alignment of outreach messaging. Focused orientation of incoming students is also used to ensure successful transition to the institution for both incoming freshman and transfer students.

The University provides an electronic Student Calendar (catalog) on its website. It provides the required information to students on policies, academic calendaring, tuition and fees, admission and degree program entrance requirements, grading and graduation requirements, and finances. The institution does not articulate the institution’s mission or core themes in the student publications as required by the Standards and Eligibility Requirements (2.D.5a; ER 17). Student records and data are appropriately protected and archived. The institution adheres to both provincial and federal requirements for the privacy of records, policies comparable to U.S. FERPA standards. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure that both staff and faculty have access to only those records necessary for their assigned roles at the institution.

The University participates in provincial and federal financial aid programs, provides scholarships, and U.S. Federal Financial Aid as a foreign institution in support of a small number of American students. The institution complies with all regulatory requirements, including exit counseling and monitoring of default rates.

Advising is divided into general advising and academic advising. The first is under the supervision of Student Services and primarily focused on undeclared students and students identified as needing intervention. Academic advising is the assigned responsibility of the faculty for all declared majors. It appears that not all faculty engage in advising, with some departments assigning responsibility to administrative staff, honor students, teaching assistants, or in some cases the undergraduate chair of the curriculum committee.

There is a concern about the adequacy of staffing levels in general advising due to the large number of undeclared majors. The University is working to create some efficiencies through self-service functions, for example the newly implement Degree Progress Report, and organizational re-alignment within existing student service departments.

The University’s auxiliary services include housing, food services, and the bookstore. The age and condition of student housing on campus is a concern, and discussions regarding the future management of the housing services are currently underway.
The University provides a wide range of co-curricular programming including co-operative education, athletics and recreation, and residence life. Many of these programs are designed to promote student leadership and development. The institution has both athletics and recreation programs. The recreation program augments a focus on creating a vibrant campus life for students. In the athletics program, student athletes are held to the admissions and academic standards as the rest of the student body. A recent strategic decision to join the NCAA may create changes in this area. Already development work is being done in other departments, for example advising, as the institution adopts policies and practices to meet NCAA standards.

2.E Library and Information Resources

The SFU Library provides staff, collections, digital assets, and access points at each of the campuses in order to support the institution’s mission and core themes and to meet the instructional and research needs of the university. Evidence was provided through review of the electronic resources, the physical materials and resources, survey results, and interviews with faculty and students as well as observation and interviews with library staff. The suite of electronic tools and resources offered by the library has greatly expanded the resources available to students and faculty anywhere, anytime - an especially important factor in an organization that encompasses a large library on the Burnaby campus and two much smaller libraries serving the Vancouver and Surrey campuses. While the libraries at each campus are facing space constraints, it is especially apparent that the aging Bennett Library has become so worn that its environment is neither consistent with the quality of the facility’s staff, services, and collections nor responsive to the need for study and collaboration space consistently expressed by students. It is commendable that the administration is exploring options, such as shared offsite storage to repurpose collection space as user space, to address these concerns in a creative manner. In addition to its success in meeting the instructional and research needs of the university, the evaluator compliments the SFU Library for its leadership role in the Public Knowledge Project, an SFU-based initiative to make accessible the results of publicly-funded research through free open access publishing.

There is extensive involvement in planning for the continued development of library and information services that most effectively meet the needs of SFU’s students, faculty, and staff. The Library’s Strategic Plans are developed with input sought from all SFU student, faculty, and staff users in formal consultation with the Senate Library Committee (which includes student representation), the campus administration, the library staff, the Library Liaisons and their counterpart Library Representatives in the academic departments, and by the library administration through the Library Council (Dean and Associate University Librarians) and the Library Planning Committee (Dean, Associate University Librarians, and division heads). The budgetary process is similarly inclusive, with the collaborative nature of these interactions demonstrated by the cooperative efforts among Librarians, Senate Library Committee, and SFU administration to meet a collections’ budget cut.

The main point of contact for formal student and faculty training and instruction in library and information resources is through the Library Liaisons, who have collaboration responsibilities with academic departments and act as gateways to programs and services ranging from web-
based resources to workshops to in-class presentations. Data demonstrate that student attendance at library instruction has increased annually over the past four years and represents substantial student contact. However, interviews with Librarians and faculty members indicate that the integration of library and information resources into the learning process is still somewhat ad hoc and opportunistic and could benefit from being a more systematic requirement across departments (2.C.6; 2.E.3). The Student Learning Commons, providing a robust and well-attended suite of writing and learning support services at each campus library, is especially notable for its demonstrated success, especially in dealing with at-risk students. The SFU Library engages in regular and systematic evaluation of library and information resources, utilizing a range of inputs, including appropriate information from campus student surveys, LibQual, Library divisional reports and staff surveys, and, every six years, external reviews. There is demonstrated evidence that feedback from these assessments results in action taken to respond to concerns, although the nature of the responses may vary; for example, recommendations found in the external review result in direct responses to the VR Research for actions, while information gleaned from LibQual serves to inform services and resource allocation.

2.F Financial Resources

Simon Fraser University is currently facing several financial constraints including capped provincial funding for enrollment, a 2% cap on annual tuition rate increases, funding issues related to its pension plan and significantly reduced provincial funding for facility maintenance. Discussions with key personnel during the site visit convinced the evaluator that, with the exception of funding for facility maintenance, the University is taking measures to mitigate the impact of these restraints.

The University is currently “overenrolled” in domestic students; in other words their domestic enrollment exceeds the level of enrollment that is funded by the provincial government. At the same time they have very high international enrollment demand. Based on these two elements SFU is planning to reduce domestic enrollment over the next 4 – 5 years to be in line with provincial funding and to fully replace these enrollments with international students. From a financial perspective this increases the net revenue to the university as international students pay a much higher rate than domestic students and therefore offsets the impact of the 2% tuition rate increase cap as well as the lack of provincial funding for additional enrollment growth.

The University is currently engaged in analysis of its pension plan funding issues and has already put an additional $3M into the plan. There are plans to include this in the bargaining process with employee groups. The evaluators compliment the University on identifying additional funds for this financial issue but until the analysis and bargaining processes are complete this remains an area of concern.

In response to significantly reduced facility maintenance funding from the provincial government the University put an additional $1M in the maintenance budget last year and then an additional $1M this year with plans to continue adding an additional $1M per year. This will allow the University to start addressing some maintenance issues but based on standards relating to dollar of maintenance funding per dollar of current replacement value SFU would
need to double the current $22M maintenance budget in order to be adequately funding maintenance needs. The University is to be complimented for putting additional dollars into maintenance as part of its budget setting process, but due to the scope of the deferred maintenance issue (see Facility discussion below) this area remains an area of significant concern which needs further plan development by the University.

An area of both potential opportunity and concern is the implementation of a new Performance Based Budget (PBB) model. In discussing this model with both the administrative and the academic leadership the overall understanding of this model seems to be high and campus-wide reaction was more positive/less negative than anticipated. An outside consultant reviewed the weightings used to accommodate for cost differences between Faculties, and bridge funding is in place to assist any Faculty which saw a dramatic decrease in funding as a result of the new model. The purpose of the bridge funding is to allow the Faculties time to increase/change the mix of their enrollment to bring their budget allocation up or to make changes to their cost structure in order to operate under a new lower budget allocation. The model does not result in upward adjustments to budgets based on over enrollment. Faculties are given enrollment targets, and exceeding these targets may result in future adjustments to their targets but does not lead immediately to increased funding – an intentional part of the model aimed at eliminating competition for enrollment. One particular area of concern under this model was that it would disadvantage smaller Faculties that still have to support a Dean’s office and a base level of “fixed” administration. There are discussions addressing this specific concern and a proposal that a base amount be allocated to each Faculty to support the Dean’s office and then the PBB funding comes in on top of that. The hope is that this change or something similar will be put in place to mitigate this area of concern. Based on conversations regarding PBB during the site visit the evaluators compliment the University for the smooth implementation of this new budgeting model but also feel that it should be readdressed in follow up evaluations to ensure that it continues to provide funding in alignment with the mission and core themes of the University.

A specific area of concern is funding for Athletics. The University has recently become a part of the NCAA, an action which comes with obligations that can increase costs, especially for requirements related to gender equity. The leaders of the Finance unit are aware of this issue but stated that they do not feel the University fully understands its obligations under NCAA requirements and that they do not have estimates on the financial impact to the University. The University does have total flexibility when determining funding to Athletics (i.e. there is no provincial cap on the amount of operations dollars that can be allocated to Athletics).

Overall, the evaluators compliment the University for its budget-setting process. Feedback from all areas indicates that this process is very consultative and transparent. There are multiple open sessions each year, some of which are open to all audiences and other targeted groups (undergraduate student association, graduate student association, employee groups, etc.). The process is inclusive in that it pulls in information from academics, advancement, research, ancillaries and other revenue generating activities.

As indicated in the above budget discussion a significant area of concern for the University is its deferred maintenance inventory. The University estimates its deferred maintenance at $717M and the University’s recent facilities audit index indicated that 53% of the SFU building portfolio is in “poor” condition with another 27% only “fair.” Based on industry “rule of thumb” for
annual maintenance budgets the University’s current maintenance budget of $22 million would need to increase to $40M based on the University’s total current replacement value for buildings. At the same time the University is facing these issues the province has reduced its funds specifically for maintenance, renovations and upgrades to buildings from $6.6M to $501,031 over the past several years. Again, as mentioned in the budget discussion, the University has started investing additional funds toward maintenance ($1M last year and $2M this fiscal year), but a significant influx of funding is needed to address existing deferred maintenance and to avoid further deterioration of campus assets. Of particular concern is deferred maintenance in the University’s housing. One housing facility has been closed due to maintenance issues and another faces serious issues. Facilities personnel indicated that the University has maximized its borrowing potential and therefore cannot issue bonds in order to build new housing facilities or renovate existing ones. Consequently, the University is currently looking at building new housing via an outsourcing agreement where a private party will build and operate the new facility. The University does understand the importance of this privatized housing having the look and feel of a traditional on-campus residence in order to maintain residence life quality.

While SFU has significant challenges with its facilities and their maintenance, there are also many facilities-related bright spots. The University has enthusiastically endorsed and implemented provincial requirements that all publicly funded new construction and major renovations conform to LEEDS Gold standard or its equivalent. The chemistry building on the Burnaby campus was recently renovated, and additional buildings for both the Surrey and Vancouver campuses have been acquired and opened in recent years. Overall, these campuses have attractive environments, appropriate for the mix of students and programs at each. The SFU technology infrastructure is described by the CIO as close to leading edge and is felt to be sufficient in capacity to meet both current needs and future plans across administrative, academic and research units. The Information Technology unit is not part of the Performance Based Budgeting (PBB) process but rather has its budget reviewed by the Budget Review Committee, which reviews all non-PBB budgets and makes recommendations for adjustments. The funding for Information Technology has been fairly level and predictable and IT personnel feel that they are included in discussions across campus where non-technology decisions could have funding or cost impacts for the Information Technology unit. Training, while not always provided by Technology, is available for users be they in academic or administrative units.

A new governance structure has been put in place for technology which includes a high-level “IT Strategies” committee plus three subcommittees for Research, Administration and Teaching/Learning (which includes student services). This new structure has been instrumental in ensuring that Technology is part of the discussion of priorities and is informed when decisions resulting in potential additional IT costs are made. The main area of concern is the current lack of an IT plan. It is the intention of the CIO that a plan will emerge from this new governance structure, and a draft plan is underway. The hope is that a final plan will be in place by the time of the next accreditation review, assuming candidacy is granted, and that this plan will continue the work done to date to ensure that IT projects are in alignment with the University’s mission and core themes.
Core Theme: Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning are clearly relevant and critical to SFU’s mission. The university allocates substantial human, physical, and financial resources to the theme. Evaluators found that faculty, staff, students, and administrators were all committed to excellence in teaching and learning, and current leadership supported strengthening this core theme through assessment and continuous improvement.

The teaching and learning core theme has objectives and indicators related to the student perspective, the faculty perspective, and the program perspective. The evaluators suggest that objectives be focused on actual student achievement and excellence in teaching, rather than on “providing opportunities” for students to succeed, or “supporting and promoting” teaching excellence. Most of the indicators are relevant to the outcomes, although the self evaluation report recognized they were limited by the data currently available. For Outcome 2.1 – “faculty provide high-quality undergraduate and graduate teaching” – the indicators do not directly measure the outcome. Some of the indicators for Outcomes 2.2 and 2.3 are more direct measures of high-quality teaching. The evaluators agree with the self evaluation report that additional data need to be collected for continuous assessment of teaching and learning outcomes, and that external benchmarking against peer institutions would be helpful.

Core Theme: Research

The research core theme needs to be congruent with the strategic research plan and the developing envision>SFU plan. As stated in the self evaluation report, this core theme reflects a mix of objectives, strategies and indicators. For example:

Objective 1. Increasing research level, quality and profile are really three outcome based objectives and level is not well defined.

Outcome 1.1: Establishing a strong research infrastructure is really a strategy (input) to create a more robust and higher quality research program. The stated indicators of funding spent on infrastructure are all input based.

Outcome 1.2: Developing well-regarded research programs may be a strategy for increasing the level of research or this may be the same as increasing the research profile.

In general, the Research Core Theme lacks focus on true outcomes, as opposed to inputs. However, it is clear that SFU tracks and pays attention to at least some outputs relevant to these Objectives (e.g., research impact as evidenced by publications and citations generated by SFU researchers; Self Evaluation Report, pp. 174-5; publications and presentations by graduate students, ibid., p. 177). It appears that a careful review of the format of this Core Theme and the existing institutional data related to it can lead to the development of a theme and assessment that is focused on outputs and actual performance.

A second shortcoming of the Research Core Theme is the lack of benchmarks or targets for assessing improvement. For example, SFU’s second objective of incorporating research into teaching and learning has two parts. The one for graduate students focuses on increasing the relative number of graduate students engaged in research and increasing the financial support per student. While these are arguably both input variables not outcomes for students (e.g.,
How will having more graduate students help assess progress related to Outcome 2.1, *Strengthen graduate student research*?), their use as indicators for institutional improvement would be more valuable if the institution set targets for each. For undergraduates, the focus is on engagement in research. In this case, the indicator (the number of undergraduates enrolled in research courses) is appropriate; but, again, the related assessment would be strengthened by specifying a target for the relevant enrollments.

**Core Theme: Student Success**

The University’s Student Success Core Theme objectives are a manifestation of its desire to provide an engaging student experience, a supportive learning and living environment, and a vibrant campus community. The institution evaluates itself as satisfactorily meeting the majority of its stated outcomes within these objectives, with the exception of two areas. The institution has acknowledged that it has not developed indicators (4.A.1) to measure student achievement of global perspectives and critical thinking skills, both cited in Outcome 1.1. The institution acknowledges that learning outcomes still need to be identified and supported in the curricula. The evaluators concur with this self-assessment. Objectives and indicators in both the Teaching and Learning and Student Success core themes should be aligned.

The second area that the institution evaluates itself as needs improvement is Outcome 1.3, student progress towards degree completion. Despite the institution’s ongoing work to improve, the evaluators are concerned that access to and scheduling problems with course offerings across all three campuses may detract from student satisfaction and timely progress to degree completion.

**Core Theme: Community and Citizenship**

The *Academic Plan 2010 to 2013*, the *Self Evaluation Report*, and the envision>SFU initiative all identify community engagement as one of the university’s core themes. However, the critical community engagement plan which will inform the university and all its departments is still “under development” according to the *Self Evaluation Report* and the team lead. For this core theme to be identified but not strategically detailed or mapped out is of as much concern to the evaluators as it is to the university. However, a new vice president for external relations was recently hired and a new task committee formed to begin this process.

The absence of this strategic plan helps explain why there is so little correlation between the varied emphases set forward by sponsors for the different planning/strategy documents, (e.g., some of the instances emphasize alumni as an integral part of the plan but others don’t mention it, or the determination to create closer ties with First Nations and immigrant communities, or link each of the three campuses closely to their communities, or provide opportunities for students to learn and apply knowledge in the global society). The completion of this community engagement plan will also enable more attention to be paid to the development of meaningful indices to better measure progress and offer direction and accountability.

The prospects for bringing the disparate parts of community engagement together are promising. Truly, the commitment to community engagement for students, faculty, and staff
alike is evident everywhere. The involvement of as many as 40 percent of the students before they graduate in Co-operative Education (and many more in co-curricular activities within the community) is noteworthy—over 7,400 are participating at this time. Furthermore, the opportunities for community/career experience include non-profit organizations (7 %), private business (60 %), and government (33 %). The establishment of new campuses/buildings in Vancouver and Surrey further demonstrate the commitment to community, especially since university officials have worked so closely with industry and government. This outgrowth has been strategic and has helped to revitalize these areas of the community and stimulate economic development and provide educational opportunities to young and old alike. Arguably the most stunning endeavor is UniverCity wherein the Burnaby campus anchors, geographically and metaphorically, a burgeoning city in which students, faculty and others live and interact. This city already is catching the attention of the international community as one of the most “green” cities in the world with one of the most innovative K-7 schools in all of elementary education. Finally, the extensive outreach of programs through Lifelong Learning continues to meld the university and community interests and resources in a synergistic way. Truly, SFU is “a university where . . . bold initiatives [are] embraced. Upon these foundations, [SFU] will engage all our communities in building a robust and ethical society.”

Compliments
1. The committee compliments the University on its longstanding commitment to and defense of academic freedom.
2. The committee compliments the University on its attractive, welcoming campus environments.
3. The committee compliments the University on the breadth, depth, and quality of its community outreach efforts.

Concerns
1. Student learning outcomes for many courses and most programs are not explicitly stated and provided to students (2.C.1; 2.C.2).
2. While all undergraduates are required to meet the WQB requirement, this requirement does not have clearly stated goals, outcomes, and learning-related expectations. Thus it does not appear to be an integrated course of study (2.C.9).
3. The magnitude of the deferred maintenance inventory is significant enough that it may soon threaten the quality of the institution’s programs and/or its financial health (2.G.1).
Standard Three—Planning and Implementation

3.A Institutional Planning

Although Simon Fraser University has just begun to practice planning as described in NWCCU standards, it has a long history of participatory planning that provides direction for the University. Planning documents such as the Three-Year Academic Plan, the Five-Year Strategic Research Plan, the provincially-mandated Institutional Accountability Plan and Report, and the President’s Agenda have been used to guide the institution for a number of years. However, several relatively recent events have greatly impacted, even revolutionized, planning at SFU. In 2009 the University adopted the University Planning Framework, which became “the means by which goals, strategies and indicators drawn from the growing number of planning documents could be concisely brought together and the alignments among them easily reviewed” (SFU Self Evaluation Report, p.133). The Planning Wheel (SFU Self Evaluation Report, p.134), which summarizes the organizational power of this document, emphasizes the centrality of the Academic and Strategic Research Plans and also illustrates developmental status of each of the plans which it coordinates.

In 2010/2011 the new President discontinued the President’s Agenda in favor of a more participatory process for setting annual priorities and began the move toward overtly connecting these priorities, along with performance accountability, with budgeting by initiating the move toward Performance Based Budgeting. During this same period the President launched a strategic visioning process, envision>SFU, which will result in a strategic vision and strategic goals for the institution. The impressively participatory visioning process culminated in a final draft of the envision>SFU document, which was presented to a University Senate committee while the evaluation team was on campus. The President reported that the draft document was well received, and he anticipates that it will be endorsed by the University Senate and formally adopted by the Board of Governors by the end of November, 2011.

While the transition to Performance Based Budgeting is just beginning, the institution has in place other practices by which planning and its resultant priorities influence budget allocation and application of institutional capacity. Externally, meeting enrollment targets included in the Institutional Accountability Plan directly affect the provincial annual budget allocation to SFU. Internally, the institutional priorities resulting from the planning process become the basis for allocation of the discretionary institutional funds enumerated in the University Priority Fund (see for example, SFU Self Evaluation Report, Appendix K, p.73).

While the evaluators have concluded that SFU substantially meets the requirements of Standard 3.A, they are concerned that the unfinished plans depicted in the Planning Wheel detract from the comprehensive nature of institutional planning (3.A.1) and that the data that are analyzed for evaluation of mission fulfillment are not clearly specified (3.A.3).

3.B Core Theme Planning

Understandably, core theme planning is in its infancy at SFU. The SFU Self Evaluation Report documents the institution’s evaluation of its performance related to each of its four themes,
and it clearly identifies the areas in which it deems its performance related to objectives as “needs improvement.” Most importantly, the initial assessment exercise has produced quite a few suggestions for planning and development of priorities that will lead to institutional improvement (see for example, SFU Self Evaluation Report, pp. 167, 179, 193, 203). While the evaluators appreciate the institution’s development of core themes and commitment to planning and assessment for self-improvement, they are concerned that there is not a consistent and institution-wide approach to systematically and transparently using data in its evaluation of core theme objectives (3.B.3).

Compliment
The committee compliments the University for the development of the University Planning Framework and the high level of activity that is leading to a comprehensive planning process that guides decisions on resource allocation and application of institutional capacity.

Concerns
1. The institution has a large number of unfinished plans that need to be completed in order to have a truly comprehensive approach to planning (3.A.1).
2. The data necessary for evaluation of mission fulfillment are not clearly identified (3.A.3).
3. There is not a consistent and institution-wide approach to systematically and transparently using clearly identified data for evaluation of accomplishment of core theme objectives (3.B.3).
Standard Four—Effectiveness and Improvement

4.A Assessment

SFU regularly engages in reviews of its programs across the institution and surveys current students, alumni, and faculty. However, since the Core Themes were only recently identified for the NWCCU accreditation process, much of the data collected was not directly applicable for assessing achievement of Core Theme objectives (4.A.1). The Self Evaluation Report stated that “few objectives came with quantifiable or qualitative targets, so assessments often relied on the judgment of each Team to determine the relative degree to which progress is being made.” Nevertheless, the initial evaluations of institutional performance related to Core Themes did result in useful assessments (results are given in the Self Evaluation Report at the end of each section of Chapter 4 and are summarized for all four Themes in Appendix A). As part of these assessments Core Theme Teams identified areas where institutional performance needs improvement (for example, the small subset of undergraduates who actually gain substantial research experience and low number of students who participate in international exchanges and field schools) and suggested next steps for developing improvement programs. This accreditation review has prompted SFU to identify appropriate metrics for mission and core theme achievement, and should lead to improved assessment procedures in the future (4.A.6). Leadership has expressed a commitment to a culture of assessment, and additional resources have been allocated to the unit responsible for data collection, assessment, and dissemination. SFU clearly needs to make progress in identifying program goals and student learning outcomes (4.A.2 and 4.A.3). There are processes in place to review (assess) programs every 7 years, including an external review, and students are obviously evaluated in every course. However, the evaluators recommend that faculty more clearly define the program and student learning outcomes (vs. a list of topics to be covered) and align their assessments with those stated outcomes. The evaluators commend SFU’s use of the external review process for tenure and promotion reviews, program and department reviews, and administrative unit reviews. The institution clearly values the assessment process and the feedback it receives from external peers. The evaluators compliment SFU on its use of planning and assessment for identifying institutional priorities and for the commitment of its leadership to developing an institution-wide culture of assessment and improvement. However, while recognizing SFU’s good start on putting in place a comprehensive assessment process consistent with the requirements of NWCCU standards, the evaluators are concerned about the shortcomings in many of the data and indicators presented in the SFU Self Evaluation Report and especially about those that relate to student learning outcomes.

4.B Improvement

The performance of Simon Fraser University in the area of assessment-based institutional improvement must be evaluated with an understanding of and appreciation for the context in
which it is employing this approach. Prior to 2009 SFU was assessing its performance and using the results of those assessments for institutional improvement, but not in ways that necessarily conformed to the details of the NWCCU standards. It is now modifying past practices and creating new ones in order to implement outcomes- and assessment-based institutional improvement.

At the institutional level there are numerous examples of assessment-based improvement efforts given in the Self Evaluation Report. Some of the clearest and most significant are strategic direction of enrollment growth toward programs that meet urgent needs of British Columbia’s economy, development of distributed options for learning to address the diverse needs of learners, and development of the Surrey and Vancouver campuses to address regional inequalities in access to higher education. The resources necessary to address these and additional high priority initiatives are being allocated in large part from the University Priority Fund, a “discretionary” portion of the SFU annual budget that is directed toward specific SFU strategic goals. In an effort to even more closely link budgeting to identified strategic priorities, SFU is implementing Performance Based Budgeting.

The situation with respect to assessment-based improvements related to student learning outcomes is quite different. Because SFU is very new to the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes, very few programs have assessment results that can be used to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices with a goal of enhancing student learning. Where results are now available (for example, the Faculty of Business), they are being actively discussed and considered in possible strategies to improve learning through an iterative process. This “closing the loop” on assessment needs to become an integral part of a culture of assessment at SFU. The leaders of SFU clearly recognize this need. Consequently development of student learning outcomes for all SFU programs is a goal in the SFU Academic Plan 2010 to 2013, and Dr. Peter Ewell was recently on the campus to assist with this effort.

Compliment

The committee compliments SFU for its widespread use of external reviews in assessing the quality of its programs and the performances of its faculty and administrative units.

Concerns

1. The University does not have a complete set of regular, systematic, evidence-based processes for assessing its programs and services, accomplishment of its core theme objectives, and the achievement of its students (4.A.1; 4.A.2; 4.A.3).
2. Results of Core Theme assessments have not yet been used for institutional improvement (4.B.1).
3. Results from assessment of student learning have not led, at least overtly, to enhanced student learning (4.B.2).
4. The University’s assessment processes suffer from a lack of uniformly good indicators and relevant data (4.A.1).
Standard Five—Mission Fulfillment, Adaptation, and Sustainability

5.A Mission Fulfillment

SFU’s Self Evaluation Report accurately describes its past effort to assess mission fulfillment as being focused on measuring “progress towards achieving plan-specific objectives” (p. 218) rather than the more comprehensive question of mission fulfillment. However, the institution realizes that an “unprecedented and revealing” outcome of the evaluation and report has been the first step in a new focus on assessment of mission fulfillment. While the evaluators are concerned that even in the Self Evaluation Report there is relatively little in the way of assessment of mission fulfillment as required by Standard 5.A, they do appreciate steps that the institution has taken in this direction. For example, elements of assessment of institutional mission appear in the Institutional Accountability Plan and Report 2011/12-2013/14—particularly the section on Performance Measures, Targets and Results, which assesses SFU’s achievements with respect to ten strategic objectives of the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education—as well as in sections of the Self Evaluation Report that summarize and synthesize the assessment of Core Themes. The significant progress that SFU has made in defining and assessing its mission fulfillment in just over two years, the mission focus that will be provided by the results of envision>SFU (implementation anticipated by the end of 2011), and the commitment of the senior leaders of the University to the assessment of institutional accomplishments lead the evaluators to believe that SFU is on the right track toward developing a culture of assessment of mission fulfillment.

5.B Adaptation and Sustainability

Simon Fraser University rightly prides itself on being an “agile” institution which is both opportunistic and attuned to the needs of its constituents. Over the past couple of decades it has developed the Vancouver and Surrey campuses to meet the higher education needs of a growing population in the greater Vancouver area, has emphasized the international component of its academic programs as a response to the internationalization of the area and its economy, and has created new academic units and programs to address workforce needs. Its recent envision>SFU process dramatically exemplifies the way in which SFU engages internal and external constituencies to identify current and emerging patterns, trends, and expectations and then develops and adjusts its priorities. The institution is very concerned about sustainability. The SFU Academic Plan 2010 to 2013 begins with a realistic assessment of the prospects of increased budget allocations from the provincial government and the subsequent assumption that re-allocation of resources based upon institutional priorities will be necessary to effect change within SFU. Several actions have been taken to implement this approach across the institution. The first one was the development of the University Priority Fund as part of the annual operating budget. This fund, virtually the only centrally controlled source of discretionary funds in the annual budget, is created by forced reallocation and is distributed to address specific institutional priorities that have been developed in a highly participatory process. The second action was the President’s
commitment to Performance Based Budgeting, a process being implemented this year. The third was the development of an internal “5th Theme”—Institutional Strength—as part of the institutional self-evaluation process.

There is abundant evidence that SFU’s commitment to sustainability has been and continues to be implemented by decisive, well- considered actions. A few examples illustrate the institution’s focus on adaptation and sustainability as well as its willingness to take significant actions to assure its future health:

- In response to the provincial practice of not funding “over enrollment” (enrollment of domestic students above the provincially assigned target), SFU is in the process of limiting domestic enrollments to the assigned target and replacing the historical incremental over enrollment with international students who 1) pay a significant non-resident surcharge and 2) contribute to the University’s objectives related to internationalization.

- The University has enthusiastically enacted the provincial requirement that all new construction and renovations be to the LEEDS Gold standard or its equivalent. Projects already completed include renovation of the chemistry building on the Burnaby campus and the construction of the first two phases of UniverCity, which includes a utility that will generate energy from waste biomass and in the future may be expanded to provide energy for the adjacent SFU campus.

- In response to provincial needs and student interest, SFU created the Faculty of Health Sciences (2004) and the Faculty of Environment (2009). Programs in both Faculties have received incremental funding (and continue to do so) that came in large part from reallocation.

Compliment

The committee compliments Simon Fraser University—and especially its leaders—for its long history of innovation and risks and for its ongoing record of steps, often bold ones, to address the issues and realities of adaptability and sustainability.

Concern

The University does not have a clearly defined process for comprehensive assessment of mission fulfillment (5.A.1; 5.A.2).
Conclusions

Commendations

1. The committee commends the senior leaders of the University for their visionary support of institutional self-improvement, which is bringing about major changes within SFU.

2. The University has three campuses, each of which has a unique and distinct personality. The Vancouver campus is playing a role in urban revitalization, the Surrey campus is part of creating a new city centre, and the Burnaby campus has utilized unique architecture and green space to create an environment conducive to interaction and student engagement. In addition the University has shown a commitment to green building in new and renovated space at all three locations. The committee commends the University for its work on creating these three distinct campuses and its commitment to an environmentally sustainable focus for investments in facilities.

3. The committee commends the University for its remarkable effort to inculcate community values and serve local, provincial, and international constituencies.

4. The committee commends the University for use of the external review process for tenure and promotion reviews, program and department reviews, and administrative unit reviews.

Recommendations

1. The committee recommends that the University develop a manageable set of meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators for assessment of its core themes, programs and services and ensure that it has the capacity to collect, assess, disseminate and utilize the data for institutional improvement (Standards 1.B.2; 2.C.1; 3.B.3; 4.A.1; 4.A.5; 4.B.1).

2. The committee recommends that the University establish and assess student learning outcomes across the institution and use the results for continuous improvement (Standards 2.C.1, 2.C.2, 2.C.5, 2.C.10).

3. The committee recommends that the University clearly articulate its “General Education” program as an integrated course of study related to the institution’s mission and assure that it has clear and assessable student learning outcomes which are effectively communicated to students and stakeholders (Standards 2.C.9, 2.C.10, 2.C.11).
4. The committee recommends that the University develop more aggressive and comprehensive short- and long-term plans for addressing the institution’s deferred maintenance needs (Standards 2.F.5 and 2.G.1).