Initial Accreditation Peer-Evaluation Report

Simon Fraser University

Burnaby, British Columbia

April 6-8, 2016

A confidential report of findings prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
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II. Introduction

Simon Fraser University, a comprehensive, research-intensive university in British Columbia, Canada, is in the final stage of a multiyear process of consideration for membership in the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. The university was granted candidacy status in 2012 and completed a Mid-Cycle evaluation in Fall 2014. This spring, the university is undergoing Initial Accreditation evaluation. A successful outcome would mean that Simon Fraser University would become an accredited member institution of the NWCCU.

The university’s stated goals for pursuing NWCCU membership include
1. increased accountability;
2. rigorous ongoing self-assessment of performance in achieving educational goals and outcomes;
3. enhancement of the value of its degrees;
4. development of strategic relationships with U.S. institutions;
5. increased public confidence in the university’s adherence to its vision and goals.

The evaluation committee conducted its site visit at Simon Fraser University on April 6-8. The university had prepared well for the visit. The university’s support for the committee—both in advance of the committee’s arrival and during its stay—was excellent. Simon Fraser University is a large and complex institution with three separate campuses, each some distance apart. This resulted in some challenges, which the university successfully addressed. For example, videoconferencing was arranged so that faculty, students, and staff on the three campuses could participate in open forums with members of the evaluation team.

The committee appreciated the responsiveness to its scheduling needs, the well-appointed workroom, the attentive IT support, the courtesy, hospitality, and cooperation the evaluators received from all quarters as they went about their work.
III. Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The self-study report was polished, well written, and clear, with easily navigable links to supporting documents. In keeping with the university’s ethos of openness and transparency, the institutional website offers a wealth of information about the university’s governance system and processes, policies, programs, and operations.

The content of the report remained at a very general level. In Standard I, for example, the process for defining and demonstrating mission fulfillment is summarized, but this section lacks particulars and a strong rationale for the approach being taken. An accompanying volume contained supporting data, but there were discrepancies between the information presented in the self-study report and the appendices. Notation about these differences would have been helpful. The committee expects that as a stronger culture of assessment takes root, future reports will contain a more convincing definition of mission fulfillment and more substantive demonstration of its achievement.

IV. Topics Addressed as an Addendum to the Self-Evaluation Report


Assessment Indicators
Section One addresses issues concerning assessment indicators and alignment of outcomes and indicators, identified by Recommendation 1 of the August 2011 report and Recommendation 2 of the August 2012 report.

Since 2012, work has progressed on the development of indicators and outcomes for the three core themes, plus a fourth “shadow” theme, “Leveraging Resources,” which was added for purposes of institutional planning within the University Planning Framework. The University Planning Committee has conducted two Strategic Reviews—one in 2014 and one in 2015—using data pertaining to the indicators. Adjustments have been made to the indicators and their alignment to goals, strategies, and outcomes in the process.

The evaluators acknowledge that progress has been made in this area, but underscore a further need to develop appropriate indicators across all levels of the university to enable fuller assessment of core themes. A new recommendation offered at the end of this report articulates this next step.

Learning Outcomes
A second pair of recommendations from earlier evaluations—Initial Candidacy (August 2011) and Mid-cycle (September 2014)—calls for student learning outcomes to be established and published for courses, programs and degrees. This has been perhaps the greatest challenge Simon Fraser University has faced in seeking NWCCU accreditation. There is no Canadian regulatory body that requires learning outcomes. A few programs at the university have professional
accreditation and faculty are aware of the highly prescriptive nature of learning outcomes assessment sometimes required for that purpose. Across Canada there has been resistance to the adoption of learning outcomes by faculty unions and the Canadian Association of University teachers. In 2011, the vice president-academic at Simon Fraser created a Learning Outcomes and Assessment Working Group, which produced a set of draft principles for consideration by the University Senate. Leading experts on learning outcomes were brought in to share their knowledge and perspectives on the topic. After much consideration and debate, the Senate approved a proposal to develop a “made at SFU” compromise. The proposal was adopted by the Senate with the guarantee that the “educational goals,” as they were called, would be phased in as part of the seven-year external review cycle for academic programs, beginning in Fall 2013 and concluding in Spring 2020. Although this is a protracted process, it appears to be a wise one for bringing about this major change in this university culture, given that the Senate holds authority over academic matters.

General Education
The third set of recommendations from 2011 and 2014 addresses the need for learning outcomes for General Education. Again, there are national differences in the approach to providing students with a broad foundational education. The report goes into great length explaining how the Writing, Quantitative, and Breadth requirements of the university are the Canadian equivalent of U.S. general education. The university is in the process of incorporating WQB learning objectives into the “educational goals,” (aka learning outcomes) of the undergraduate degree program.

The evaluators concur that additional work is needed to develop and implement meaningful student learning outcomes and assessment across the curriculum, including the WQB requirement.

Deferred Maintenance
The fourth recommendation, from August 2011, called on Simon Fraser University to develop plans to address deferred maintenance needs. The current Self-Evaluation Report outlines measures the university is taking within its Capital Plan and in its ongoing work with the Provincial Government to manage this challenge. The evaluators are satisfied that progress is being made.

V. Eligibility Requirements

The university was found to meet the Commission’s Eligibility Requirements, with one caveat. ER 22 stipulates that member institutions must “identify and publish expected learning outcomes for each of its degree and certificate programs”, as well as “engage in regular and ongoing assessment to validate student achievement of these learning outcomes.”

As noted in the previous section and documented in the Self-Evaluation Report, finding a way to adopt the U.S. model for learning outcomes assessment is perhaps the greatest challenge Simon Fraser University faces in the NWCCU accreditation process. Changing academic culture and practice cannot be done with the flip of a switch. The Simon Fraser University faculty began the process of considering a move to learning outcomes in 2011. In 2013 the University Senate
adopted a policy and process for making this move. The roll-out began that year and will be completed in 2020. In academic terms, that is lightning speed. It is a tribute to both the strength of the academic governance system at Simon Fraser University and the acumen of faculty and administrative leadership that this major change is underway.

Although the establishment of learning outcomes for academic programs will not be complete for another four years, the evaluators are satisfied that the university has committed to this course and is working systematically toward its 2020 goal. It was noted that the Commission’s letter of March 3, 2015 cites Recommendation 2 concerning learning outcomes with the note that this is one of two areas in which the Commission has determined that Simon Fraser University is substantially in compliance, but needs improvement. For a Canadian institution undertaking the project of introducing learning outcomes for the first time, it is significant that Simon Fraser University has put a comprehensive plan in place and is making progress toward fully meeting this eligibility requirement. At the same time, it is apparent that much work remains to be done.

VI. Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

Standard 1.A Mission

Simon Fraser University developed what it calls its “Vision/Mission and goals” through a major process of community consultation. Both the University Senate and the University Board of Governors approved the final version in November 2011. It appears to be widely known and understood by the university community. Confirmation of this came through the evaluators’ conversations over the course of the site visit.

The Vision/ Mission and goals have been integrated into a widely publicized University Planning Framework that was the subject of discussion with members of the Board of Governors, the University Senate, and administrators across the university. The institution’s performance in fulfilling its Mission/Vision and goals is assessed regularly through a process of Strategic Review that has been underway for two years. The university has selected a strategy goal and outcomes for each core theme and assigned specific indicators for those goals. Mission fulfillment is judged to have been achieved if the data show annual improvement and/or the successful achievement of declared targets.

Concern

- The evaluators appreciate the efforts made to date, but found some of the indicators to be somewhat superficial reflections of institutional accomplishments. The selection of more meaningful indicators could yield more valuable data and insights to inform the university’s efforts at continuous improvement (Standard 1.B.2; 3.B.3).

Standard 1.B Core Themes

The three core themes of Engaging Students, Engaging Research, and Engaging Communities, as well as the fourth fundamental theme of Leveraging Institutional Strengths, are well defined and identified in the SFU 2016 self-study evaluation report. There is also evidence of broad dissemination of the core themes across the university through the university website, marketing materials, supplementary documents, and reports at various levels across the university. The
onsite discussion with a variety of campus constituents confirms the university commitment to the core themes and the process of evaluation.

The university graphically, and in narrative form, describes the relationship among its core themes and how the integration of those institutional priorities supports mission fulfillment. The committee recognizes the work that has been done in assessing the core theme of Engaging Students and SFU’s commitment to student learning, but is concerned that the measures are indirect. Since 2012, the University has addressed the Year One Evaluation Report Recommendation #2, regarding the alignment of indicators for assessment to outcomes; there remains a concern, however, that the revised indicators are also not meaningful enough to generate data useful for measuring mission fulfillment or institutional improvement (1.B.2; 4.A.1). It was also noted through the site visit campus discussions that there is still work to be done on articulating the ‘best’ metrics and targets that would be the most suitable for measuring mission fulfillment. For example, indicators for experiential and co-operative learning are focused on number of credit hours rather than the learning that occurs as the result of these experiences. Information from employers regarding students’ knowledge and skills would help corroborate student self-reports obtained through surveys. The committee encourages the University to continue progress toward indicator reevaluation and revision. A related matter is the need to identify appropriate targets. The committee understands that recently, SFU constituents agreed on a target for retention, which was a significant step forward, but the target is set at the current rate. If the purpose of assessment is to learn from the findings and make continual improvements, setting targets at current rate will not produce useful data for continuous improvement.

To define the core theme of Engaging Research, the University strategy focuses on capitalizing on the research strengths of the university. Cross-disciplinary initiatives, consideration of graduate and undergraduate research experiences in addition to faculty research projects, and extending research findings to the broader society and community are aspects of the strategic research planning process currently in progress at the institution. In addition, the 2016-2020 Strategic Research Plan Advisory Committee is collaborating with the Bennett Library to explore alternative metrics for measuring progress on the engaging research core theme.

Evidence of the Engaging the Community core theme is evident on all three SFU campuses. The unique characteristics of the different campuses provide a wealth of opportunities for connecting, educating and interacting with community constituents. The Surrey campus engages high school students by hosting an after-school computer gaming design club for local high school students. The downtown Vancouver campus organizes lectures and other events to engage the downtown community in key public issues. One example is Lunch Poems at SFU, which is a free and open opportunity for the community to enjoy poetry once a month. The Burnaby campus is collaboratively planning a 50th anniversary to engage the Burnaby community.

**Compliments**
- The NWCCU committee compliments SFU for its comprehensive planning process, the integrated planning framework, and progress made thus far on aligning supporting operational plans.
• The Strategic Research Plan Advisory Committee is complimented on its efforts to collect and analyze data to inform the planning for the new 2016-2020 Strategic Research Plan.

Concern
• Some of the revised indicators are not meaningful enough to generate data useful for measuring mission fulfillment or institutional improvement. More work is needed to articulate suitable metrics and targets for assessing mission fulfillment (1.B.2; 3.B.3; 4.A.1).

VII. Resources and Capacity

Standard 2.A Governance

The governance structure at Simon Fraser University is well established, effective, and broadly understood. The Self-Evaluation Report provides a valuable overview of the Canadian higher education system whereby public universities are authorized by provincial legislation and accountable through the Ministry of Advanced Education to the Provincial Government on matters including academic standards, quality assurance, governance, and financial performance.

An Accreditation Steering Committee, made up of the president, vice present and deans, monitors compliance with NWCCU standards. The institution is accurate in its representation of its current status with the NWCCU.

Governing Board

The Board of Governors resembles governing boards of U.S. universities except for the fact that all authority for academic affairs resides with the University Senate. While the Senate has the authority to approve new academic initiatives, the Board of Governors has the funding authority. All evidence suggests that the two bodies cooperate effectively and well.

Conversations with five of the eight external members of the 15 person Board of Governors provided evidence that these volunteers were knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the university and strongly committed to its values and future. They were very supportive of the university’s pursuit of NWCCU accreditation.

As an ex officio member of the Board of Governors and the chair of the University Senate, the university’s president (an appropriately qualified, full-time CEO) plays a key role in connecting the work of the Board of Governors and the University Senate. The Board of Governors has a majority of external members, but also includes two elected faculty members, two elected student members and an elected non-faculty employee of the university. The Senate is predominantly made up of faculty, but also includes students and administrators in its membership.

The Board of Governors conducts its business in accordance with NWCCU Standards 2.A.4-2.A.8, with one exception:
Concern

- It does not appear that the Board performs regular review of university policies as called for in Standard 2.A.6. Rather, it seems that policies are revisited when it becomes evident that they are outdated. Establishing a cycle for pro-active review would be advisable.

Leadership and Management

The university leadership is made up of well-qualified and capable individuals. Their work together on behalf of the institution is well coordinated through a clearly articulated management structure that spans the entire university. The newly adopted model of mission, core themes, and assessment has been well integrated into existing systems of administration and planning. According to several senior administrators, the accreditation standards have helped to transform institutional planning from a largely operational exercise to a strategic one.

Policies and Procedures

Academics

Academic policies are clearly communicated and readily available to the Simon Fraser University community through the university’s website. The university also provides the opportunity for university community input when new policies are being considered.

All library and related policies are available on the library website. Among those policies are: Library Code of Conduct; Fair Use of Information and Communications Technology; Student Code of Conduct; and Code of Faculty Ethics and Responsibilities.

The university has published policies regarding transfer credits to which it adheres and that support students in moving between and among institutions. The university policy is aligned with the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT), the Provincial mandate to direct articulation and transfer among British Columbia post-secondary institutions. The university also maintains a “live” database containing information on articulation and transfer credit rules for colleges and universities worldwide.

Students

Student admission policies and procedures are commensurate with the institutional mission and available on the SFU web pages. The institution participates in the common British Columbia Post-Secondary Application Service. The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer facilitates transfer credit policies and agreements within the province. Transfer policies, regulations and direct institutional agreements are posted in the SFU Calendar. The institution maintains an extensive database of international credit transfer agreements and subscribes to the Pan-Canadian Protocol on Transferability of University Credit. Institutional policies on grading, education programs and career paths, courses, rules and regulations, fees and refunds, financial aid opportunities, and the academic calendar are readily available on the SFU web site, The Calendar, and department websites. Student records are backed up electronically. The university complies with the British Columbia Privacy Act and with institutional policies on access and release of student records.
Policies and procedures regarding student rights and responsibilities are published and posted on the relevant websites. Avenues for registering concerns and appeals are available through a variety of channels including an Ombuds Office, the Office of Human Rights and Equity, Campus Safety and Security, and the Code of Conduct and Academic Integrity processes. Annual reports on cases reviewed, types of complaints and consultations, and incident reports are available on the unit websites.

**Human Resources**

The institution maintains and publishes its human resources policies and procedures; however, a regular cycle of review is needed and planned but has not been fully implemented. Employees are provided the conditions of employment, work assignments, rights and responsibilities, criteria and procedures for evaluation, retention, and termination. The institution publishes the policies that identify access to and guarantee the privacy of human resources records in accordance with provincial and institutional policies.

**Institutional Integrity**

Simon Fraser University does an excellent job of communicating with its various constituencies both on and beyond the campus through electronic and print means, and—it might be added—through various forms of outreach to the wider community. (The Vancouver and Surrey sites—and the activities they sponsor—speak volumes about the university’s “engaging communities” core theme.)

The University Communications Office, which exercises central oversight for university communications and marketing, engages staff across the university in the ongoing task of representing the institution, clearly, accurately, and consistently. (The management of an incident involving a video of questionable taste that was posted to YouTube provided a good case study in how issues are addressed and protocols adjusted to ensure clear communication about the university and what it stands for.)

Institutional integrity begins at the top. Interviews with external members of the Board of Governors provided evidence of the Board’s concern with issues of institutional ethics and integrity in matters of safety, investment, and civil rights. Board awareness of and responsiveness to student concerns was also demonstrated. For example, interviews revealed that a student concern raised with evaluators had already reached the Board of Governors and a thorough policy review had been undertaken on the matter.

The university has appropriate policies concerning conflict of interest and intellectual property.

Regarding contractual agreements with external entities, the Self-Evaluation Report details its contractual relationship with an Australian for-profit firm, Navitas, which runs the Fraser International College (FIC) on Simon Fraser University property. FIC offers a pathway program for international students that prepares them for matriculation at Simon Fraser University or other universities. It is authorized by the Provincial Government in the manner of community colleges having articulation agreements with universities. According to the contract, FIC
students who meet certain standards are guaranteed admission to Simon Fraser University—and Simon Fraser retains oversight of FIC’s academic program, policies, and pedagogy. The relationship is subject to review at five-year intervals. The evaluators are satisfied that the conditions of the agreement protect the university’s integrity and comply with the Commission’s Standards.

FIC appears to be the only contracted service that relates directly to the institution’s educational mission. Other contracts pertain to services such as catering, maintenance, construction, and the like. The university’s Procurement Services Office outlines terms and conditions for contracts that include provisions to protect the university’s interests and integrity.

An Accreditation Steering Committee, made up of the president, vice presidents, and deans, monitors compliance with NWCCU standards.

**Academic Freedom**

The Faculty Code of Ethics and the University Framework Agreement with the Faculty Association are the primary documents through which academic freedom is defined. In addition, the importance and expectation of academic honesty is communicated through numerous policy documents including the Code of Student Conduct, Integrity in Research and Misconduct in Research, Conflict of Interest and others.

Faculty and students confirmed that the University maintains an atmosphere in which intellectual freedom and independence exist and where they feel free to examine and test all knowledge appropriate to their discipline. Commitment to academic freedom is further reinforced in the Principles & Definition document approved by Senate (June 11, 2012).

**Standard 2.B Human Resources**

Simon Fraser University, as a mature institution, has a sophisticated human resources operation that reports to the Vice-President of Finance and Administration. The current strategic plan is at the end of its cycle and ready for renewal. The new plan should incorporate clear and defined effectiveness metrics. SFU enjoys a positive image as an employer and has relatively low turnover. The Acting Associate VP has established a roadmap for future strategic planning including updated recruitment strategies, management performance, wellness programs, developing leadership competencies, managing change, and identifying new metrics for measuring the effectiveness of the HR operations.

Seven employee groups represent the non-academic and continuing and temporary academic staff. A new Performance Development Program aligned with institutional goals has been developed. Professional growth opportunities are defined for each employee group.

Faculty positions are posted on websites of the Vice-President, Academic and Academic Relations and are advertised nationally and internationally. Policies for evaluation, tenure, promotion, and salary review are defined in university policy and communicated upon hire with notification provided for required reviews. Each academic unit establishes department level
criteria, standards, and evaluation measures as ratified by the department, dean, and reviewed by the Vice-President, Academic. Review of criteria is renewed or revised every three years. Appeal processes are on the website for Academic Relations and the SFUFA.

Compliment

- SFU as a mature institution has well established and communicated human resources policies and procedures. As a part of the institutional planning process a regular review of the human resources policies and procedures is planned and would ensure currency and reflect the dynamic nature of institutional change.

Standard 2.C Education Resources

Learning Outcomes
SFU has a well-established and effective external review process for academic programs with clear guidelines and support. The review process encourages faculty ownership and accountability through an internal self-study, external review, an action plan, and a progress report in the fourth year. The seven-year cycle allows time for data collection, analysis, and implementation of changes based on findings. The development of educational goals (aka learning outcomes) to be included as part of the external program review process and aligning these goals with individual courses within each program is underway. Evidence indicates that departments are embarking on the external review process with the inclusion of educational goals and identifying specific actions based on assessment results. The benefits of these educational goals are being recognized across campus and are leading to thoughtful discussions about ways to improve learning, and greater transparency for students about what is expected. Constituents report that educational goals are being viewed positively as an opportunity rather than being imposed upon them. Similarly appreciated is the provision of resources, both financial and human, and the gradual implementation of the change. Planning is beginning to occur around learning goals in terms of designing course components and identification of needed resources, and several departments are developing their goals prior to their external review.

Progress in this area is encouraging given the cultural shift needed to change practice with regard to student learning outcomes. The university has committed support to assisting faculty to make this shift by providing funding for faculty development such as webinars, invited external speakers with expertise on assessment and student learning outcomes, and support from teaching and learning focused projects in collaboration with the Teaching and Learning Center. The Teaching and Learning Center is also providing templates for creating assessment plans, writing student learning outcomes, and aligning courses to program outcomes. Of particular note is the institution’s ability to identify a context-specific approach that integrates new expectations into an existing framework (e.g., external review). This also demonstrates the willingness of institutional leadership to respond to faculty concerns. Departments are encouraged to determine assessment models that are discipline-appropriate, which further demonstrates willingness on the part of the administration for how this expectation can be met and an understanding that these efforts must be designed in ways that are meaningful to faculty.

Staff in the Teaching and Learning Centre clearly have the needed expertise and commitment to support the continuing implementation and evaluation of these efforts. They are appreciated and
viewed as being part of the faculty. Department chairs exhibit clear understanding and strategies for helping faculty see the benefits of outcomes assessment to improve the learning experience for themselves and their students. Those who are successful in their assessment practices are acting as role models and assisting their colleagues in their efforts. These are all very positive signs.

Monitoring of educational goals as part of the program review process is needed to ensure that this is a significant component of the review process and that related findings are acted upon. Consistent reviews of the quality and rigor of assessment plans should be implemented by those with expertise in this area such as educational consultants in the Teaching and Learning Center, assessment experts who are part of external review teams, or possibly a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate with assessment expertise.

In spite of the gradual gains made in implementing student learning outcomes assessment, consistent and widespread communication of educational goals to students in written form has yet to occur. Course outlines posted online do not yet contain this information for the most part. Some faculty are discussing program goals with students in order to help them understand expectations, and are strategically designing assignments and learning experiences with outcomes in mind. Some have plans to include outcomes in the learning management system as a way to communicate them to students. Continuing training, provision of resources, and support for the identification and alignment of course and program level outcomes as well as WQB outcomes is needed. Much appreciation was expressed by faculty and department chairs regarding the support provided thus far.

Defining and assessing Writing Quantitative Breadth (WQB, aka general education) outcomes remains a challenge. A plan for assessing these requirements beyond the student self-assessment survey used for the core theme of Engaging Students is lacking. Such a plan might entail integrating the assessment of WQB requirements with the educational goals for each program. Departments that provide service courses (e.g., math) are seeing the need to coordinate with programs they support in order to align outcomes with cross-disciplinary needs. This illustrates some of the benefits and challenges of developing learning outcomes for WQB requirements. Criteria for qualification of courses to meet each of these areas exist and could serve as the basis for the development of learning goals.

An emphasis on interdisciplinary programs to help students synthesize knowledge, make connections across disciplines, and be well prepared for their future professions is emphasized. There is strong evidence of teaching faculty and library partnerships to enhance the teaching and learning experience. There is a process in place in the library for reviewing new courses and curriculum to assess the availability of library resources for course topics and content. University faculty serve on the Senate Library Committee and librarians in turn serve on several campus-wide teaching and learning committees. There is strong evidence that librarians partner with faculty to ensure the integration of information and library resources into the curriculum. Requirements beyond the major, specifically breadth and writing and quantitative courses, which are decentralized and flexible, allow for an intentionally designed and integrated curricular experience. Clear, faculty-driven processes for establishing and eliminating courses and programs in order to maintain relevance and responsiveness to current business, industry, and
professional needs, and to ensure quality, consistency, and rigor, is under the direction of the University Senate.

The evaluators did hear concerns expressed about the availability of course sections, but did not verify the existence of a serious problem. As a part of the planning and continuous improvement process, a regular review of the number of sections for required courses in programs would assure responsiveness to institutional growth and student demand.

**Online Instruction**

Several individuals expressed concern during the visit that while faculty design courses for online instruction and have initial meetings with tutor markers, regular faculty rarely teach these courses. There is variability in the teaching experience of the tutor markers and once developed, the content of these courses remains static. There appears to be some reliance on online instruction as a revenue source to departments so there may not be an impetus to update courses. The potential overuse of tutor markers and lack of interaction between the tutor markers and the faculty are concerning to the review team.

Online students receive the same services as face-to-face students, including support for students with disabilities on an as-needed basis. Online students are governed by university policies. Credit bearing courses offered online are part of the normal array of courses offered by the department and are thus approved and monitored through the normal academic governance process and are compatible with the institution’s mission. There is some concern that the campus lacks a university strategy around blended and online learning.

**Graduate Programs**

SFU offers an extensive range of programs from the certificate to doctoral level that support institutional mission and are offered in a variety of delivery modes, on multiple campuses, and are characterized by co-operative education. Highly ranked and high quality graduate programs with competitive admission standards and requirements designed to prepare students to be leaders in their fields and create new knowledge, and which involve community partnerships, are available. The rigor of these courses and programs is monitored and maintained through the process of graduate studies committees, approval through the senate, and external review. Only tenured and tenure track faculty may chair graduate committees. Graduate committees include an external member. Survey data is used to determine graduate student application of knowledge after completing their degrees. While SFU does not have a graduate faculty, the faculty who direct graduate education appear well qualified to do so.

Graduate programs may allow double-numbered undergraduate courses to count towards the degree, depending on the discipline. Where double-numbered courses exist, students taking the courses for graduate credit have higher coursework expectations. Students may also take up to half of their courses from other institutions, expanding their options to customize their degree and take advantage of expertise elsewhere. The transfer policy in this regard is quite liberal and benefits the students. Graduate program requirements differ depending on whether the degrees are masters, doctoral, or professional. Expectations for students’ field experiences and internships are a critical and integral component of some programs, and policies are in place to grant credit for these experiences.
To supplement preparing graduate students for research, professional practice, and scholarship, a Research Commons has been established at two of the SFU campus libraries to encourage a research community of practice. This space is dedicated for graduate student use only and provides research resources, research development, which includes workshops on research tools, thesis boot camp events for research writing, and writing and research consultation support.

**Continuing Education and Non-Credit Programs**

SFU Lifelong Learning offers online courses to 15000-20000 regularly admitted students annually for credit. These courses are developed by faculty and have learning outcomes. They are taught primarily by tutor-markers who are graduate students who guide and advise students through the course and do the grading of student work. The departments hire faculty/tutor-markers to teach online. Staff from the Center for Online and Distance Education work with faculty to develop online courses.

All non-credit courses have student learning outcomes. While non-credit certificates and diplomas are approved by the Senate, individual non-credit bearing courses do not need Senate approval. Most non-credit certificates have student learning outcomes and those that do not are being added upon review by SFU Lifelong Learning program directors on a 3-5 year cycle. Non-credit programs have Program Advisory committees that often include members of the community. Non-credit courses may be offered by regular or retired faculty. Programs such as Liberal Arts 55+, and Philosopher’s Café are popular and are appropriate for the institution’s engagement goals. Offerings are targeted to the intended audiences and are effectively promoted and publicized. The institution maintains records that describe the number of courses and nature of learning provided through most non-credit instruction.

**Standard 2.D Student Support Services**

The University offers an extensive range of student support services directly linked to the academic mission of the university. The programs and services are guided by a strategic five-year plan with evidence of utilization of feedback from student surveys, institutional data, internal reviews, institutional committees, and the student societies for continuous improvement. Program services have prioritized the institutional theme of student engagement and student success. Student Services staff and administrators are highly qualified and are guided by membership in appropriate North American and Canadian professional associations.

The collaborative planning process for student services is highly developed. The emerging development of more sophisticated key performance indicators and robust assessment methodologies will be useful for continuous improvement in achieving goals.

The comprehensive Senate Committee on Enrollment Management and Planning determines enrollment management targets, recruitment strategies, retention plans, and evaluation. An appropriate scope of merit-based and need based financial aid opportunities are provided and published via the institutional website, provincial websites, and the Calendar. Allocations are based on recommendations of the Senate Policy Committee on Scholarships, Awards and Business. A Canadian student loan program is administered externally. The BC Outcomes
Survey results for undergraduates (administered 2 years and 5 years after graduation) identified lower debt levels for SFU graduates than other Canadian Universities. Repayment rates as reported by the Ministry of Advanced Education are above the national average. Internal and external audits of components of the program are conducted and indicate a well-managed program that is responsive to recommendations and findings.

In recent years there has been a greater emphasis on student retention. Advising is provided through a bi-level system of student services advisors and faculty. Online support services are also available. Recruitment, admissions, financial aid, and student success plans and strategies are aligned among student services functions and with the faculty and departments.

Co-curricular activities are commensurate with the Core Themes of Engaging Students and Engaging Communities as well as student success. The SFU Student Society has recently negotiated a loan for the construction of a new student union and stadium space scheduled for completion in 2018. Residential Life, bookstore, and food services operations review student feedback data and are committed to a model of continuous improvement. As is the case with some other campus facilities, Residential Life is faced with ongoing deferred maintenance needs. Students interviewed expressed a need for more affordable housing for families and graduate students. In the Residential Life Master Plan, there is a target to provide housing for 10% of the student population.

The Campus Safety and Security Services provide incident statistics on their website. However, due to increased interest in student safety and to support recruitment efforts, incident (including crime) statistics could be more prominently displayed.

Increasingly, colleges and universities across the continent are under scrutiny for the management of student harassment and discrimination issues. One matter that arose in the evaluators’ visit was the possibility that students are underreporting incidents of harassment because of perceptions about how they are being handled. While student rights and responsibilities are clearly spelled out in institutional policies, there are multiple avenues for seeking redress that could be confusing to students. It would be helpful to establish a cycle of regular review for policies and procedures, to make certain that responsible offices and appeals channels are identified in student-centered language, and to provide on-going educational training programs on topics of harassment and discrimination to the university community.

The Intercollegiate Athletics program is a Division II member of the NCAA. The Self Study for Certification and the NCAA reporting requirements have provided a comprehensive review of the overall program, future sports for consideration to ensure equity, and planning areas for improvement. NCAA Compliance and academic support services are consistent with the institutional goals, are organized and structured to maximize effectiveness and are guided by an institutional Compliance Committee. The University has a fitness center and offers a full complement of club sports, classes, and intramurals. Agreements with local fitness companies provide access for the downtown and Surrey campuses.

Compliment
• SFU Student Services provide an extensive and integrated array of student support services, that are well-planned and managed, organized around the life cycle of the student, data supported, and aligned with the institutional planning process and Core Themes. There is clear evidence of extensive collaboration, shared values, and commitment to the academic culture of the campus and student success.

**Concern**

• The university is advised to establish a regular review cycle for policies and procedures to ensure that they are clear, user friendly, and up-to-date (Standard 2.A.18).

**Standard 2.E Library and Information Resources**

Typical of the change occurring in libraries worldwide, there is evidence that the SFU library is adapting to changes related to librarian roles, technology, patron needs, and budget limitations. Evidence from SFU Library public annual reports, self-studies, and adaptations of library spaces documents how the library provides access to library information and resources for students, faculty, and staff. The library continuously adapts services and programs to meet campus needs. The library resources and information available appear adequate in currency, depth and breadth to support the SFU mission and core themes. Librarians provide support through face-to-face instruction, consultations, partnerships, and library resource guides, as well as through online chat (AskAway), online writing support, and online tutorials on all three campuses. A strategic decision to focus on building the electronic resource collections with a decrease in purchasing print holdings was based on patron preference for electronic over print resources, as well as the library commitment to equal access.

As part of this digital focus, the library lends laptops and other technical devices and supplies. There is also evidence of a growing digital library collection and special collection holdings. A new construction project is underway in the library for a larger temperature controlled vault for the expanding special collections print materials. A concerted effort has also been made to assure that there is specific resource support for individual courses through a course assessment process that takes place after the University Senate approves new courses and curriculum. In addition to expanding resources, the library has also initiated new services such as the Student Learning Commons on all three campuses for undergraduate research and writing support, which aligns well with the Engaging Students core theme. The Research Commons, on two of three campuses, supports graduate students by providing research and thesis/dissertation writing support that aligns with the Engaging Research core theme. There are three different and unique libraries, the Bennett Library in Burnaby, the Belzberg Library in downtown Vancouver and the Fraser Library in Surrey. Each library serves populations and needs specific to its unique community context, an arrangement which aligns well with the Engaging Community core theme.

Even prior to the university community embarking on the NWCCU accreditation process, the SFU libraries had already initiated the development of the 2011-2016 Library Strategic Plan with 6 strategic directions. The library collected data on services, programs and library spaces. Several 2011 taskforces and committees were convened to examine data and report on specific initiatives, programs and services such as a review of the library liaison structure, and the
development of a Research Commons. Although little documentation is available publicly on the more current library data gathering efforts, there is evidence from the Library Senate Committee meeting minutes of the continuous progression of actions and changes taken that are based on library data collection. In addition, library data is also collected through yearly student surveys done through the Office of Institutional Research & Planning. Missing from the library public presence are student learning outcomes (educational goals) for library instruction work. However, after discussion with librarians and the library administrative team, it became evident that the development of learning outcomes for library instruction is in progress, and the outcomes will be presented as part of the new 2016-2020 Library Strategic Plan that is currently in preparation. The library is also implementing a newly created teaching librarian position, which was added in January 2016. In addition, other key librarian functional positions have been added to the library staff, based on supporting new emerging campus initiatives such as data management librarian, and digital scholarship librarian. The NWCCU committee suggests that the library publish the student learning outcomes when available to showcase the excellent innovative and adaptive work the library is engaged in as it improves services and programs to support the university mission and vision.

The three SFU libraries are unique in character and function. Each one is designed to meet the needs of local patrons. For example, evening and weekend classes and community lectures are held on the downtown Vancouver campus to accommodate a focus on lifelong learning and graduate student contexts. The Surrey campus library loans high end video/audio and photography equipment as well as video games, in addition to books to support the School of Arts and Technology program. The Bennett Library, the largest library, was bustling with activity during the NWCCU site visit and provides the widest range of resources and services to support the majority of students.

The Library Annual Reports present in a concise way the way in which the libraries are engaged in supporting the institutional core themes. The library has successfully integrated the ‘new language’ of the four university themes into its own mission and strategic directions. Evidence is found also in public materials such as the library website, and marketing materials. Through partnerships and collaborative projects, the library demonstrates how the work is aligned with the four core themes. Evidence from library documents also confirms how the library is making an effort to support the underlying principles related to the four core themes. The library collaborates with faculty in providing library resources specific to individual courses, online Canvas materials, online tutorials and library research guides. Library services such as the Student Learning Commons and the Research Commons provide students with one-on-one support for research, writing, and academic success. As mentioned in 2.E.2, it is recommended that the library design and develop its own student learning outcomes (educational goals) for their library programs so that its work can be more visibly aligned with faculty course educational goals. Aligning library work with the newly developed Framework for Information Literacy by the Association of Research Colleges (ACRL) may be another strategy for helping the library take a proactive role in leading the campus learning outcomes efforts. The library is also embedded in the Engaging Research Core Theme and provides support and consultation in relation to helping the Research Theme Team and faculty identify new alternative metrics for measuring research output. Graduate students receive support in the Research Commons for writing, thesis work, and research software and tools such as NVivo and SPSS. The library also
holds an annual faculty celebration event to showcase SFU faculty scholarship. In addition, the library collaborates with other partners such as the Center for Teaching and Learning, for example, in a grant for an Open Education Resource Project. The library also plays a leading role in several national and regional projects such as the Public Knowledge Project, housed at the Bennett Library, that focuses on developing open source software related to dissemination of quality scholarly publishing as well as multi-BC university projects.

In the annual student surveys conducted at SFU, responses to questions concerning the value of the library services and programs were very positive. In the 2015 undergraduate survey, 91% of students reported that they were satisfied with the library (other than Student Learning Commons); 85% said they were satisfied with the Burnaby physical library space, 76% are satisfied with the physical space of the Surrey Library, and 64% said they are satisfied with the physical space of the Vancouver Library. Of 5909 students who responded to a question about academic integrity and cheating policies, 41% reported that they learned about academic integrity and cheating policies by using the library online plagiarism tutorial. LibQual, a survey specifically for gathering faculty, student and staff feedback about library services, is conducted on a regular schedule. A new faculty feedback survey is currently in the process of being implemented to gather additional faculty data. The library is also beginning the process of developing its new strategic plan (the current plan expires in 2016) and will use data collected from newly implemented initiatives as well as current library data to inform decision making in that area.

In collaboration with other British Columbia post-secondary libraries, the SFU library hosts the British Columbia Electronic Library Network that fosters cooperative agreements for online support, resource sharing, and electronic journal licensing. The SFU Library also hosts the Electronic Health Library of British Columbia, which supports training and online information service to practitioner organizations. The Public Knowledge Project, another collaborative initiative also housed at the main library, develops free and open software for scholarly publishing. There is evidence of many different partnership and collaborative library projects across the three SFU campuses and also at the national and BC library community that are systematically evaluated and improved.

Compliments
- The NWCCU committee compliments the library for its efforts to rethink services and programs based on patron needs and aligning these services and programs to the newly emerging university mission and core themes.
- The committee applauds the library’s strategic efforts to support the core themes of engaging students, research, and community that are truly embedded in the operation of all three libraries.
- The evaluators also recognize the library for the excellent processes and communication channels that are in place to allow for resource sharing, staffing flexibility, and use of technology tools, such as videoconferencing, to unite the three very different and unique campus libraries.
Standard 2.F Financial Resources

Sufficient Reserves

Simon Fraser University is a government (Province of British Columbia) supported institution, which is a two-edged sword in that historically the university receives a majority of the funds to support its programs and services from the Province, but it is also vulnerable to political policies of funding higher education that can run counter to the needs and growth of the institution. The funding has been substantial over the years, but in recent years it has declined as a percent of budget and has not kept pace with the costs of programs and services. In fact, one trustee reported that SFU is nearing the point that tuition revenues will exceed the annual grants from government. Further, SFU cannot raise tuition for domestic students, because of provincial regulation, beyond the rate of inflation, which has been at 2%. As a result, SFU has increased other sources of revenues, primarily by admitting international students, primarily from Asia and mostly from China. International students now represent about 20% of the student body and pay tuition rates 2 ½ times the rate of domestic students. SFU has been able to raise the international tuition rate by about 10% a year, although such a raise is not being planned for the new budget year (2016-17). The international student strategy has also benefited SFU through “royalties” from Fraser International College (FIC), an independent college that provides English training and lower division courses to students who are not ready for immediate enrollment to SFU. The arrangement provides guaranteed admission to SFU if the student succeeds in the FIC program. This generates about $9 million a year in revenues. Even with the challenges faced due to limited government funding and the ceiling on domestic student tuition increases, the University has still generated strong net operating results through a conservative approach to budgeting expenses and strong controls.

A key performance indicator (KPI) used by the school as a financial health measure is to track operating reserves (defined as net operating assets). The university has set a goal of 2-9% of annual revenues for the reserves. On its face this seems like a rather low level of protection for the institution’s programs and services that might be jeopardized by surprise drop in revenues (e.g., drop in support from government or decline in enrollment), especially for a sustained period. A 3% reserve level (as it is at the end of the fiscal 2015) represents only 11 days of operations based on fiscal 2015’s total operating expenditures. Normally it would be doubtful that such a level would meet the “sufficient reserves” expectation contemplated in Standard 2.F.1. In the case of SFU, however, the KPI measurement they have chosen is just one of the protections the institution has, if faced with a significant revenue decline. SFU currently has another approximately 3% of its annual budget devoted to contingency funds (including the strategic priority pool) that can be accessed to offset a surprise drop in revenue. In addition, there are other designated (“internally restricted”) net operating assets set aside for various programs and projects of the institution. And on a truly “deep reserve” basis they have other internally restricted funds that are legally available to the institution as contingency. All of these other reserves and contingencies, if used, would certainly precipitate significant changes in plans and have negative impacts on goals the institution, but they are legally available to the Board if needed to continue core programs and services. To illustrate this overall view of contingency and reserves, SFU’s KPI 3% reserve level at March 31, 2015 is $18.867 million, but when one adds in the $16 million in contingency funds in the annual budget and the other “internally restricted” operating nets assets of $38 million, plus the $35 million of quasi-endowment funds, there is
$108 million in total unrestricted net assets or 17% of revenues (about 4 times the amount of the KPI level at March 31, 2015). Again, this view of total reserves is total protection for major revenue challenges, not the normal operating reserve level that SFU has elected to use so other designated funds can be used for strategic purposes. *(The amounts used in the discussion above from Note 18a of the March 31, 2015 audited financial statements and from interviews with leaders of the financial area.)*

The long-term bond debt level of SFU is relatively low for an institution of this size, as the government has instated a prohibition against issuing new debt. The two major long-term obligations of the institution are related to a defined benefit pension plan provided staff and post-retirement benefits (PRB) provided employees hired before 2004, which are $27 million and $65 million respectively as of March 31, 2015 as reported on the audit report, although on a “solvency actuarial basis” the obligation for the pension plan is said to be $80 million. SFU has frozen the PRB benefit program to employees hired prior to 2004, but it will be many years before it is retired. SFU is not funding this obligation, but instead paying the benefits as they are provided to eligible retired staff out of the operating budget. The defined benefit pension plan is being funded by the institution and is running at 19% of total payroll and is expected to increase further unless the plan is modified.

The evaluation team believes that SFU could improve its compliance with Standard 2.F.1. by strengthening its stated key performance indicator “net operating reserves as a percent of revenues” goal to the higher end of its range (i.e. 9-10%). Further, the Committee agrees with the University’s concern about the large obligation (estimated to be about $140 million in total) of the pension and post-retirement benefit plans and its intention to pursue a plan to deal with this, since the institution has described this as an inordinate and increasing commitment from the annual operating budget.

**Budget Planning**

Simon Fraser University has relied on strong operating results for many years. Budget planning is top down driven, in that planning starts with updated revenue projections based on thoroughly developed enrollment plans and known grant levels from the government. Research grant revenues intrinsically drive expenses per grant requirements. Resource planning as it relates to capital spending has been more problematic due to the high level of deferred maintenance and renovation needs compared to funding sources which are limited for several years as the provincial government has prohibited new debt and substantially reduced grants for facility improvements (although this appears to be turning around in that the university is expected to receive approximately $17 million in new grants from the government to address facility renewal, which is about 5 times the amount received in recent years). SFU has had to respond with creative funding approaches to address facility needs including “borrowing” from strong liquidity provided by a variety of restricted resources. This borrowing stands at a total of $30 million (see footnote 18a of the recent audit report) and according to the SFU’s financial staff this is slated to be repaid over the next 10 years through utility savings and allocation from operating surpluses.
Planning, Policies, and Participation

As a government supported institution, the university has numerous policy requirements placed on it and the institution has also developed many policies around financial planning and budgeting, which are fully communicated to members of the campus community. The university has published a wide array of policies and reports on their extensive institutional web pages for access by the community. After leaders have set the parameters for the annual budget (e.g., revenue amounts) and strategic goals to be funded, the community is invited to forums to hear of the emerging plans and given an opportunity to provide input. The strategic goals that are a priority for funding in any annual budget are themselves a product of a community review and feedback process.

GAAP Accounting and Controls

The evaluation team has examined SFU’s financial reports, auditor’s opinion on the financial statements and management letter, and found their accounting in compliance with the Canadian equivalent of U.S. based GAAP with no control concerns noted by the auditors. The institution appears to have sufficient internal budget and accounting controls as evidenced by its strong operating results and high level of reporting to the B.C. government under their regulations.

Capital Planning and Debt

Simon Fraser University has a well-developed Campus Development Plan (aka master plan) that was created in 2010. The university has a rolling five-year capital project plan that it updates annually. This five-year capital project plan gave evidence of being aligned with the Campus Development Plan, plus being informed by core theme planning, and addressing the goals of strategic priorities and needed deferred maintenance. The major challenge for the institution is finding sufficient funding since it is reliant on surplus funds generated from operations and grants from the provincial government. The University is not allowed to issue new debt by provincial law, which is often a lost cost approach used by higher education institutions to fund long-lived assets. The University has a robust and competent staff that deals with planning, cost estimating and implementing capital projects and the institution uses professional consultants on a regular basis to assist with these projects.

Auxiliary Enterprises

Simon Fraser University has auxiliary enterprises and it accounts for these enterprises on a separate basis and they have to cover their costs on a self-sustaining basis. After all costs are covered a small contribution of net revenues from auxiliary enterprises is made to the general operating budget to cover indirect and unallocated costs. The exception to this is the student housing auxiliary that has a relatively small amount of revenues so it does receive allocations from the general operating budget to assist with its significant deferred maintenance needs. The relationship between auxiliary and general operations is well articulated and clear accounting separation is maintained.
Independent Audit of Financial Statements

The University has an annual financial audit conducted by a qualified and independent national firm of chartered accountants. The governing board has a Committee of board members called the Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee which approves the auditor engagement and receives the report on the results of their work, including a set of required disclosures from the auditor and a letter of recommendations for improvement. The evaluation team reviewed these reports and found them quite comprehensive and informative. The management letter had only minor issues noted and including one auditor prompted adjustment to the financial statements. Most audit risk areas identified by the auditors at the beginning of their work resulted in no findings.

Fundraising

In conjunction with its fiftieth anniversary year celebration, the university is on track to complete a $250 million campaign next fall.

It appears that Simon Fraser University relies on the leadership of the vice president for advancement and alumni, the standards of the Association of Fundraising Professionals—Canada, and thorough audits by the Canada Revenue Agency to ensure that its fundraising activities are conducted in accordance with professional ethics and government standards. According to the university’s vice president for advancement and alumni, the university’s fundraising wing adheres to the ethical standards for the Association of Fundraising Professionals Canada. As a highly visible not-for-profit in British Columbia, a premium is placed on protecting and maintaining the reputation of the institution. The Canadian Revenue Agency conducts thorough audits of the university’s fundraising activities.

The current vice president is retiring in three months and a search is underway for her replacement. The position description for her replacement identifies “exceptional and unwavering integrity” as one of the expectations for the successful candidate.

The university has relationships with two foundations that bear its name. One is the Friends of Simon Fraser University Foundation, incorporated in July 1969 in Seattle, four years after the founding of the university. This foundation was established for the purposes of receiving gifts from U.S. donors so that they may obtain U.S. tax receipts.

The Simon Fraser University Foundation is a Canadian foundation that was established in the 1980s. At that time, Canadian law allowed Crown Foundations to receive 100% tax deductible gifts for universities and hospitals. This arrangement was subsequently changed when it became apparent that the law had created an uneven playing field for charitable organizations. There still are some tax advantages for gifts of real estate and charitable remainder trusts received through such foundations. The university’s president’s house and some faculty housing are currently held as assets of the foundation.

It is not clear from the documents provided to the evaluation committee (including articles of incorporation and bylaws) if and when they may have been revised. Legal review of these and
related documents might be wise to ensure that the language adequately protects the university’s interests if, for example, one of the foundations is disbanded.

**Compliment**
- The evaluation team compliments SFU for its strong financial management and responding well to reductions in government funding and its recognition that it needs to increase its operating reserve as evidenced by its selection of the operating reserve ratio as a key fundamental core theme performance indicator.

**Concern**
- The evaluation team noted SFU’s increased reliance on international student enrollment in the face of reduced funding from the government and the growing impact of pension and post-retirement benefit obligation on the University’s operating budget, but the current level of operating reserves is only about 2.9% of annual revenues (fiscal year-end 2015). While the university has a variety of designated net assets that could be accessed if SFU experiences an unexpected major decline in revenue (e.g., shortfall in international student revenue), it would disrupt strategic and core program and support service plans of the institution to do so. The evaluation committee believes the University should set as a high priority its intention to increase its operating net asset reserves. (Standard 2.F.1)

**Standard 2.G Physical and Technological Infrastructure**

**Physical Facilities and Equipment**

The university has substantial physical assets that comprise its three campuses in Burnaby, Surrey and downtown Vancouver. The Burnaby campus is its primary and largest campus started in 1965 from a land grant from the province of British Columbia. It is developed along the top of Burnaby mountain and uses the terrain to guide the building layout and has a clear architectural theme including a visible “spine” of straight open space running over a mile from end to end of campus with spectacular views of the mountains and water surrounding this beautiful city in the northwest. Development has come in periodic pushes versus continuous build-out after the initial campus founding in 1965, with the latest “spurt” in the 2006-2009 period taking advantage of favorable construction costs. The concrete and glass style presents a massive “here to stay” image. This modern style looks futuristic even as it harkens back to its 1960s roots. The mostly adjoining building layout (to keep people dry and warm during inclement weather) across the very large campus provides a unique sense of connectedness that in a way exemplifies the spirit of SFU. This style also presents some challenges in terms of renewal costs and flexibility as programs and needs change and in some emergency situations (e.g., active shooter) the connected buildings may present some search and containment problems, especially since there is not an internal video monitoring system.

The university faces many of the same challenges as any large urban public institution with many aging facilities and shrinking government funding and growing amounts of deferred maintenance. SFU clearly recognizes this and updates its facility audit every three years to measure progress in addressing its deferred maintenance. The most recent survey shows a total
estimated deferred maintenance cost of $241 million on a facility replacement cost value of over $2 billion or 12%. After several years of relative drought in facility funding from the provincial government, SFU has recently learned it may be in line to receive $19 million in the next year to start to chip away its large capital plan. Also, it has learned that there may be some Federal sources of funds coming its way. While it still a small percentage of its total need, it is a major increase from the $2 million it received last year.

Because of this, SFU has had to use surplus operating funds and working capital cash to address the more urgent capital needs over the last several years. It has advanced $30 million to the facility or plant fund from otherwise designated operating net assets reserves and purposes, which will have to be repaid. Finance officers indicate the plan is to repay this inter-fund borrowing ratably over the next 10 years.

Both the Surrey and downtown Vancouver campuses are attractive, functional and appear to meet the needs of the programs and services conducted at these sites. The Surrey Campus in particular is impressive in its innovative approach to facilities, but it has proven to be so popular with students that they have reached capacity and are in need of expansion. An additional building has been planned nearby the current Surrey building that will allow for growth. The downtown campus has been developed to meet the needs of its academic programs, but also is at a level to attract corporate and other conference business. Two of its main facilities were gifts to SFU.

A tour of some of the buildings, offices, classrooms, labs and social spaces provided evidence of functional and attractive spaces for students, faculty and staff. While there is wide span of age and style in the internal space, the University is making progress on renewal. The active learning classroom was impressive as was the overall capacity across campus. The facilities appeared to be well managed, clean and supportive of the institution’s educational mission. When asked, students, faculty, and staff expressed satisfaction with facilities, equipment and spaces at SFU.

Hazardous Materials

Among the many useful web-based policy statements that the SFU maintains is a clear and comprehensive policy on handling of hazardous and toxic materials. While faculty have the lead responsibility for managing this in the local laboratories, the institution pays careful attention to provincial and federal laws for disposal of hazardous materials. According to administrators who were interviewed, SFU has not had “surprise audits” by agencies such as OSHA or WISHA that neighboring institutions in Washington experience from time to time, so there could be policy gaps or weaknesses in SFU’s “hazmat” handling and disposal procedures that might be detected by such an independent audit. The Committee suggests that SFU consider hiring an independent consultant to conduct an unannounced or surprise audit of academic laboratories and “hazmat” handling departments to determine that responsible individuals are in compliance with policy and to consider if there are deficiencies in the policy.

Master Planning

The University has a Campus Development Plan (CDP) last updated in 2010 that serves as its master plan and it has started developing criteria for selection of consultants to assist the institution to preparing the next update in a few years. The plan shows such things as campus build-out plans and goals, open space, circulation, purpose zones (i.e., residential, athletic,
academic, etc.) and development guidelines and standards. Since the CDP was developed prior to SFU’s full articulation of its core themes and related implementation plans, it will be important for the University to ensure that the update being pursued fully embraces such goals and related objectives.

**Technological Infrastructure**

Technology plays a large role in most institutions of higher education and for SFU it is a significant supporting infrastructure, but it also serves as major program line under the “Engaging Research” core theme as the Information Services division itself manages grants received for information technology research. The byproduct of this research enriches the knowledge and sometimes the resources of the technology support functions in Information Systems (IS), apparently SFU’s new nomenclature for its information technology unit (the self-evaluation report refers to the “IT Services” for its technology unit, but the recently hired new chief information officer now refers to it as “Information Systems”).

The University has fully developed administrative, academic and support technologies that it deploys throughout the institution. Computer labs for students seemed ubiquitous during a tour of the campus (all sites). One of the high level KPIs for SFU’s so-called fundamental core theme, “Leveraging Institutional Strength,” is “Joint availability of core services,” which is a percentage measure of the “up-time” (i.e., on and functioning) of the institution’s technology (network, servers and systems). Over the last two years this has been measured, it is has achieved just shy of 100% reliability, in which the IS area takes pride.

While investment in technology infrastructure has been very strong at SFU, apparently there has not been a cohesive vision and structured planning approach to projects and resource investment. The recently hired new chief information officer, at SFU only six months, has already developed a vision statement, planning structure and policy papers for information and technology advancement at the University. Called “One I.S.” the aim is to create an integrated set of plans and resources to serve the institution, instead of an aggregation of individual systems and resources (e.g., stand-alone data systems that do not communicate well with other information systems) that appear to be the former modus operandi. A new multi-representation “One IS Steering Committee” has been established to provide guidance to IS staff on resource stewardship, enterprise architecture, strategy planning and approval of new projects. The future of IS at SFU appears to be bright and heading in the right direction. The chief information officers, when asked, indicated that the University’s funding of IS has been appropriate. Subsequent self-evaluations reports prepared by SFU and future NWCCU evaluations should carefully assess the implementation and effectiveness of this new direction and these well-developed plans. Further, the Evaluation Committee believes that the University should carefully construct a set of measurable indicators around the new IS to help it assess its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. For instance, SFU could expand its KPIs for the technology area in more detail around user functionality and satisfaction than just “up-time” as it is currently doing.
VIII. Planning and Implementation

Standard 3.A. Institutional Planning

Simon Fraser University has a well-established institutional planning culture. As a public university in British Columbia, it is required to submit an annual Institutional Accountability Report that includes a three year plan and demonstrates the university’s alignment with the strategic goals of the Ministry of Advanced Education.

In its Self-Evaluation Report, the university identifies a series of ongoing institutional planning processes that guide the work of the university. These planning processes address budgeting, strategic enrollment, faculty renewal, emergency preparedness and disaster recovery, the IT business recovery, and the Aboriginal strategic plan. These are offered as an illustrative rather than a comprehensive list.

Planning is conducted in a broad-based and inclusive manner with opportunities for review and input by relevant constituencies. Once finalized, plans are posted on the university website.

The University Planning Council directs the institution’s planning efforts. This council, which meets weekly, operates under the direction of the Executive which includes the president, vice presidents, and associate vice presidents.

Evaluators were told that in recent years, university planning has shifted from a primarily operational focus to one that is highly strategic. The formal adoption of the institutional vision/mission and core themes in 2012 is said to have provided a unifying focus to planning work. This integrative focus is graphically expressed in the university’s Planning Framework, humorously described as a pizza or bicycle wheel, and very familiar to various audiences with whom the committee spoke. The institutional “vision, mission, and underlying principles” form the central core or hub of the circle. Encircling the hub are “goals, strategies and indicators.” The next ring is divided into three arcs representing core theme planning. Those, in turn, are encompassed by faculty and department plans, then the plans of administrative units—all of which are nested in the financial and governance models.

This design is intended to express the alignment of all the academic and administrative areas of the organization and how together they serve to support the overarching values and goals of the university. As one individual put it, the development of the University Planning Framework has been an “education for the institution about itself.”

The Planning Framework invites demonstration of how specific planning efforts around this wheel are contributing to achieving core theme goals and objectives, and fulfilling the institutional mission. This assessment project is the university’s next big challenge.

Compliment

- The university has established a comprehensive institutional planning framework that integrates ongoing and participatory planning across sectors of the University and
underscores the relationship of these efforts to the institution's shared vision, mission, and goals.

Emergency Planning and Preparedness

SFU’s planning efforts include emergency and disaster recovery and continuity planning. The Vice President for Finance and Administration has overall responsibility for these planning streams, but the actual planning is conducted primarily by the chief safety officer and her staff and the chief information officer and his staff. The institution provides for daily back-up of data to an off-site location and has battery and generator back-up to its data centers. According to the chief information officer, all buildings have immediate battery back-up to network circuits and key computer installations, but only priority buildings have additional generator back-up. Given the high reliance on electronic communications, the institution plans to gradually increase the scope of generator backup capability through campus.

The University has done extensive emergency planning including an earthquake “tabletop” exercise with representatives from Christ Church in New Zealand, where they are recovering from a massive earthquake in 2011. The chief safety officer reports that the exercise generated key information and was a learning experience for the institution and renewed the administration’s commitment to disaster planning. The University has also conducted a one-time full-campus drill involving all employees and students on-campus at the time and all buildings according to the chief safety officer. This drill occurred three years ago and was a major undertaking and none has occurred since then. While the emergency plan is comprehensive and available to all members of the community, there is no process to determine how widely it is read and informs students’ and employees’ preparations. Anecdotal evidence (student interviews by evaluation team members) indicated that some members of the community are unaware of what to do in a case of campus emergency.

The committee believes Standard 3.A.5 is seeking “preparedness” not just planning for emergencies and recovery. Without more rigorous and frequent testing of the plan (e.g., training of faculty, staff and students and annual drilling), it is doubtful that plans will be effectively enacted in an actual emergency. SFU’s large and wide area campus layout (i.e., connected buildings from end to end) poses a significant challenge for dealing with an active shooter scenario—the incidence of which is increasing on school campuses. Testing the plan by holding campus drills provides the opportunity to identify areas of weakness in order to make potential improvements in the plan and increase the effectiveness of the institution’s preparedness.

Compliment

- The evaluation team compliments the University’s attention to developing emergency and business interruption plans and for conducting one large scale table top exercise around an earthquake scenario.

Concern
• The evaluation team noted that since its one table top exercise conducted three years ago, SFU has not regularly tested its emergency plans and does not know if members of its community are knowledgeable about their plans or what to do in an emergency. The evaluation team believes the University needs to conduct regular tests of its emergency plan with students, faculty and staff to ensure a higher level of preparedness of its community members. (Standard 3.A.5)

IX. Core Theme Planning and Effectiveness

Responsibility for core theme assessment has been assigned to three Theme Teams, each led by an associate vice president. These teams carry out the process of assessing institutional performance on the core themes and present their reports to the University Planning Council.

Core Theme: Engaging Research

Introduction: Engaging Research

Simon Fraser University’s vision/mission is to be the leading engaged university defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research, and far-reaching community engagement. The goal of the core theme Engaging Research is “To be a world leader in knowledge mobilization building on a strong foundation of fundamental research.”

This core theme was described to the evaluation team by SFU staff as the aspiration to be recognized as a leader in engagement with research and by strategically developing a select number of programs that would lead to world-wide recognition. The Engaging Research core theme includes the engagement component, cutting edge research, and community engagement and thus is well aligned with the institution’s mission/vision. The goal reflects the institution’s aspiration to further develop its already strong research reputation to engage with those who would benefit from the research and to further contribute to the applications of research to the broader community (knowledge mobilization).

The Canadian government awards competitive research funding for transformative programs that can lead to global excellence and economic development. An example of the university’s success in this area is a recent award of a multi-year, multimillion dollar grant for hydrogen fuel cell research. As the lead institution, Simon Fraser University developed a coalition of institutions and private partners (engagement with research) to develop significant expertise, intellectual capital, basic research, and applications that ultimately benefit mankind (knowledge mobilization).

Table 2 of the self-study was current at the time of its writing but has been updated since. The updated table is included in Appendix B, page 88. The update adds a new fourth outcome with a pair of indicators as well as several new indicators for pre-existing outcomes. The update more appropriately aligns indicators with outcomes, adds an outcome that more directly addresses knowledge mobilization, and includes indicators that are more outcomes-based. The appendix also includes data and targets for each indicator.
Planning: Engaging Research

A strategic research plan was developed for 2010-2015. It identifies seven broad research themes and a list of actions to be taken but with no clear outcomes, targets or metrics to make it strategic or to evaluate success. The selection of research themes, if pursued strategically and successfully, could help the institution accomplish the goal of this core theme. The plan does not, however, mention the core theme or align well with some of its indicators. The priority programs chosen for the 2010-2015 strategic research plan do not appear to be guided by data, nor do they have clear objectives, goals or outcomes.

A new strategic research plan (2016-2020) is currently in draft form, but has not yet been finalized by the committee which is comprised primarily of faculty and chaired by the Vice President, Research. The evaluation team encourages the committee to include strategic targets and metrics that, if achieved, will lead to documentable evidence of Simon Fraser University as a world leader in engaged research and evidence of the extent of knowledge mobilization. The current plan uses language for objectives such as: maximize opportunities, promote, cultivate, facilitate, and encourage that does not lead to measurable outcomes or tie directly to world leadership or knowledge mobilization.

Assessment: Engaging Research

A Strategic Review process is used to regularly and systematically collect and analyze data for each indicator for the Engaging Research core theme. An overall assessment by the theme team is that all of the indicators demonstrate that SFU is achieving its targets and therefore fulfilling the University mission/vision. The process is in place for ongoing collection, analysis of assessable and verifiable data to evaluate the stated core theme objectives.

Improvement: Engaging Research

The Strategic Review process involves faculty and provides a potentially effective system of evaluation. Annual targets are set, data are collected and analyzed annually, and the institution documents and disseminates the results of the Strategic Review process. The annual process and review allows for mid-course corrections in strategies used to achieve the targets and so provides a way to holistically consider accomplishment and capacity for accomplishment of the core theme. The institution provided an example of how the identification of, and focus on a priority area, has led to a significant collaborative multimillion dollar grant.

It appears that targets for each indicator are extrapolations of existing trends rather than strategically determined targets or outcomes that would move the institution towards a measured achievement of its goals and core theme. To advance its research profile, the institution may wish to develop a more strategic approach in its selection of indicators for this core theme.
Core Theme: Engaging Students

Introduction: Engaging Students

Simon Fraser University places the education of students as its central purpose. In its mission, the university articulates its aspirations for and commitment to “innovative education, cutting-edge research, and far-reaching community engagement.” Consistent with this commitment, the university identifies Engaging Students as one of its Core Themes. Student engagement is viewed as providing students with the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary to promote success in an evolving global context. Simon Fraser University contextualizes engaging students through a broad set of metrics that include such factors as the retention and graduation of undergraduate and graduate students, skill acquisition and engagement in experiential activities, and the ability of students and graduates to apply knowledge and skills in the work place and/or learning environments. Through this core theme, Simon Fraser University integrates the three elements of its mission by providing students with diverse learning experiences, opportunities to engage in research, and opportunities to engage with diverse communities and individuals.

The theme of engaging students reflects Simon Fraser University’s mission, and particularly, its commitment to students as partners in learning. The institution has identified objectives and indicators for this theme, specifically retention and completion rates, credits earned in co-operative education, and student self-assessments of educational quality as well as communication, analytical, and learning skills. These measures have been implemented, data collected, and specific actions identified to improve the learning experience. These include both new initiatives and existing initiatives to make improvements regarding each of the goals for this theme.

Planning: Engaging students

Student engagement at Simon Fraser University has historically been viewed as engagement in the classroom or academic arena. Thus, this core theme reflects the university’s strong emphasis on academic success with related metrics to demonstrate the success of the academic experience. At the same time, the 5 Year Academic Plan identifies a broad range of other efforts to deepen and document student engagement across other aspects of the student experience. The Student Services plan aligns with the three major strategic goals of the university. The university’s long-term challenge is to capture and integrate the co-curricular experiences and engagement identified by Student Services, in order to more fully coordinate the many efforts that are under way to engage students across all aspects of the student experience. This broader description of engagement will also reflect requests by students for more acknowledgement of students’ desire for more student life and campus community engagement.

The indicators are tied to key priorities in the university's strategic plan. The primary aim for the Engaging Students Theme Team as it pursued this theme was to have more explicit articulation of goals for admissions, retention and graduation, as well as other measures of educational effectiveness. Generally, the identified success targets are benchmarked to the current level of institutional performance. The metrics for student engagement are attached to indicators that can be most easily measured, with progress being judged by upward trends on those measures. While
retention and graduation rates are convenient and available forms of data, the Theme Team would do well to identify additional indicators that might lend deeper and more nuanced insight into students’ educational experience.

Assessment: Engaging Students

The university conducts an annual Undergraduate Student Survey, as well as participates in the annual Canadian Survey Research Consortium project. The outcomes of the surveys show that Simon Fraser University matches or exceeds the national average in terms of its students’ assessment of satisfaction with the quality of their education, willingness to recommend the University to others, and satisfaction with the communication, analytic and learning skills they acquire. Information from these surveys is used to inform program improvements, budget requests and staffing. These data have been especially useful in garnering additional investment in student support staffing and improving the quality of food service across campus.

Improvement: Engaging Students

Through survey responses students have expressed desire for improvements in student life, campus community, and physical spaces. This sentiment was reinforced by conversations with student services staff who communicated a need for more community gathering and study spaces, particularly on the Burnaby campus. Data also indicate that students rate their acquisition of job-related skills below that of their peers at other Canadian universities. These are two areas that the Engaging Students Theme Team has identified for further improvements. The theme team has identified activities and initiatives within each of those areas to sustain and improve its outcomes (Self Evaluation appendix pages 30-32).

The committee recognizes the work that has been done in assessing this core theme and Simon Fraser University’s commitment to student learning, but is concerned that the measures are indirect. Exploring the use of direct measures that demonstrate student learning is needed to fully address the standard in terms of meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement. Indicators for this theme could be linked to the educational goals being developed by departments to provide a more meaningful assessment of student learning. Also, although response rates on institutional and provincial surveys, another measure for this theme, are solid, the surveys are limited to self-report information.

Similarly, indicators for experiential and co-operative learning are focused on credit hours rather than the learning that occurs as the result of these experiences. Information from employers regarding students’ knowledge and skills would help corroborate student self-reports obtained through surveys. This should include business and corporate partnerships for co-operative learning as well as post-graduation employers to determine if these stakeholders are satisfied with the level of preparation of the students and in what areas, and if gaps exist. Information should be sought for both broad learning outcomes such as written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking as well as discipline-specific skills.

Another aspect to address is the need for targets. Data has been tracked over a period of time, which provides a good foundation upon which to determine goals. The committee understands
that recently Simon Fraser University constituents agreed on a target for retention, which was a significant step forward, but the target is set at the current rate. The purpose of assessment is to learn from the findings and make continual improvements. Not having targets seems to indicate that the status quo is acceptable. If it is, then other measures need to be considered that will provide information leading to actionable initiatives to better equip students with the learning reflected in the objectives related to this theme.

**Concern**
- The university is encouraged to identify stronger indicators and to reconsider its thresholds for achievement for this core theme (Standards 1.B.2; 3.B.3; 4.A.1).

**Core Theme: Engaging Communities**

**Introduction: Engaging Communities**

SFU aspires to be Canada’s most community-engaged research university. In accord with this vision, we noted with commendation a remarkably rich and varied array of community engagement programs that reflect and bolster the mission of the institution. SFU has succeeded in reaching and partnering with community organizations, alumni and individuals from across the region. SFU students have benefitted from the numerous public activities, internships and projects and in turn, community organizations have profited through access to space, staffing and academic support. There is pride in the reciprocal nature of these activities and a sincere desire to achieve co-equal partnerships. Through its three campuses and community engagement efforts, SFU has infused itself into the community and nurtured long-term community partnerships.

**Planning: Engaging Communities**

In 2013, Simon Fraser University received approval of its first three-year Community Engagement Strategy from the University’s Board of Governors. This proposal identified several priority areas designed to increase access to SFU’s faculty and resources. Since that time the University has demonstrated significant growth in student, research and community-engaged planning and activities. A Strategic Community Engagement Action Plan (SCEAP) was developed to define the networks and mechanisms through which community engagement could be supported at SFU. This planning process consists of four phases and will extend over five years beginning in 2015 with the identification of key stakeholders and conducting a situational analysis, continuing in 2016 with consultation and identification of community engagement opportunities and issues, moving onto the synthesis of data gathered from the first two phases and culminating in 2020 with implementation. This effort is consistent with the institution’s comprehensive plan and has already proven to guide the selection and implementation of programs and services.

**Assessment: Communities**

The SFU Strategic Review, 2015 is used to address the Engaging Communities Theme by regularly and systematically collecting and analyzing data related to the number of participants in SFU local outreach programs and the number of its active international partners. In addition,
the level of success of alumni engagement is measured with an Alumni Engagement Score. Growth, in local outreach programs was particularly impressive. The Engaging Communities Theme Team, including faculty and administrators, reviews indicators and outcomes and makes recommendations as appropriate. Given the emphasis placed on the mutual and reciprocal exchange of knowledge and resources and the distinction drawn between engagement and outreach it would be prudent to identify more meaningful indicators related to reciprocity of benefits and consider approaches that will operationalize the different as well as shared characteristics of engagement and outreach. Tabulation of number of participants in outreach programs, while important, does not capture the fullness of what it means to be an engaged research university.

As noted above, SFU has established and implemented processes for gathering, analyzing and disseminating assessment data and for using this data to support continuous improvement. Faculty reported that “engaging communities” is not just a “marketing strategy” but that “we live and breathe it”. Community engagement has also been described as having deep roots within the institution. These statements reflect a passion and commitment that is unique and laudable. A number of SFU departments including Urban Studies, English, Geography, and Health Studies engage in community collaboration. The popular Liberal Arts 55+ and Philosopher’s Café are examples of the vibrancy and relevance of SFU’s engagement goals. Community engagement can become an even greater force with the systematic addition of opportunities designed to integrate and align current and future programs into the academic curriculum, and to foster a model of scholarship of engagement. This would not only acknowledge the value of these activities to students and faculty and deepen the ties to community but would establish community engagement as integral to the education of all SFU students.

Improvement: Engaging Communities

The 2014 NWCCU Mid-Cycle report included two recommendations regarding this core theme. We compliment SFU for addressing these recommendations. The University hosted visits for community engagement expert Linda Hawkins, Director of the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (ICES), University of Guelph. Discussions are underway to secure the services of a second community engagement expert, Barbara Holland. The university launched a formal project to develop a framework for documenting, evaluating, and supporting Faculty of Science outreach programs. Further, the Office of External Relations conducted an inventory of SFU’s Engagement with Municipal Governments. Recently, a Portal “SFU Live” was created to encourage dialogue and a sharing of ideas around specific topics. Additional projects such as City Studio, Friends of Simon Tutoring, and Racing Readers are but a few examples of successful efforts in community engagement.

Concluding Summary of Standards 3.B. and 4.A

Simon Fraser University has selected sound and appropriate core themes, and has in place the appropriate structures to conduct ongoing planning, assessment and improvement of performance across the institution in support of the core themes. In its Initial Accreditation review, the university has essentially “primed the pump,” using data collected for some general institutional indicators identified for its core theme goals. Now the challenge is to expand and deepen the assessment process by identifying learning outcomes for all academic programs as
well as goals for administrative areas that support the institutional core themes. The evaluators strongly encourage the university to develop meaningful indicators that will yield valuable insight into how the institution is achieving its goals and in what ways its effectiveness could be improved.

X. Mission Fulfillment, Adaptation, and Sustainability

Standard 5.A. Mission Fulfillment

Even before its current attempt at NWCCU accreditation, Simon Fraser University had a culture of regularly evaluating the adequacy of its resources, capacity, and effectiveness of operations. As a public institution with required reporting to the provincial government in order to access funding, the university had a thoroughly developed process to evaluate its resources (finances, facilities, staffing, programs, services, etc.). It also had followed a practice of periodic external reviews of academic and administrative units.

On the other hand, as stated in the self-evaluation report, Simon Fraser University along with other Canadian higher education institutions has not focused on learning outcomes, institutional assessment and doing data-based evaluations of mission accomplishments. As a candidate for NWCCU accreditation, the university has indicated its desire to do so and has started the planning and implementation of an “assessment culture” and aligning of its plans and resources allocation decisions to core themes to support mission accomplishment. It will take several “trips” through the cycle of planning, assessment, adjustment, and improvement for the university to be able to show that it evaluates itself on a regular basis.

New as it is to the NWCCU framework for defining and assessing mission fulfillment, the university is not yet well versed in how to conduct assessment of learning outcomes and to make fully productive use of core theme objectives, goals and indicators. At this stage, the university can make a strong case for institutional health and success from its established forms of planning and review, but it is still in the process of implementing the NWCCU model and integrating it into its planning work.

SFU’s self-evaluation report notes that it is just beginning to use its review activities and assessment findings to complete the “circle back” to determine if it is accomplishing its mission and core themes. Indeed, as its first attempt to comply with NWCCU accreditation standards, it is not surprising that this process is not fully developed. The Committee found evidence of understanding of the needed process at the leadership level (senior administrative leaders, various planning committees, and even trustees). As noted earlier in this evaluation report, however, the assessment process itself is not fully developed throughout the institution at all levels. More work is needed in areas such as development of meaningful indicators and collection of data that could be used to assess accomplishments and provide thorough evidence-based conclusions. SFU has conducted a “Strategic Review” process to assess mission fulfillment twice now, in 2014 and 2015. The Strategic Review is just emerging as a potentially effective tool, but needs to be strengthened by more rigor in the selection of indicator measurements and fuller assessment of results at the course, program, and institutional levels of the planning framework.
Obviously, being on the initial journey to “close the circle” on assessment, it is hard to show “regular, systematic” assessment. Standard 4.A.6 expects an institution to assess its assessment process to see if it provides the kind of meaningful results to reach appropriate conclusions. This should come in time.

The evaluation committee was impressed with the involvement of many leaders at various levels of the institutions in planning committees (e.g., UPC, Theme Teams, department planning groups). The university also demonstrates a remarkable commitment to transparency and communication of results to its constituencies and the public (part of this is regulatory driven being a provincially supported institution).

**Standard 5.B Adaptation and Sustainability**

SFU showed evidence in the interviews conducted throughout the evaluation visit that it clearly monitors external and internal environments in order to identify emerging educational program opportunities, and potential operating improvements. The success of the highly innovative Surrey campus including its unique facility to deliver high technology and science programs of study is clear evidence of SFU’s not only monitoring the environment for such opportunities, but showing leadership in pursuing and implementing them with success.

The representatives of the Board of Governors that were interviewed by the evaluation team showed a commendable level of understanding of SFU’s mission and core themes and could articulate a compelling case of SFU being an “engaged university”. The Board clearly is involved and active, but there was not much evidence that the “governance system uses those findings to assess its strategic position, define its future direction, and review and revise, as necessary, its mission, core themes, core theme objectives, goals or intended outcomes of its programs and services, and indicators of achievement (Standard 5.B.3)”, at least as it involves the Board of Governors. Perhaps it is too early in SFU’s development of the assessment process to see this happening at the Board level. It is the case, however, that the Strategic Review process, which focuses on mission fulfillment as assessed by the Core Theme Teams, is reviewed by the president and vice presidents, then goes to both the University Senate and Board of Governors for their review, after which it is made available to the university community.

The route through the governance structure is in place. With the development of more sophisticated forms of core theme assessment and the completion of the University Senate-approved plan for phasing in learning outcomes across all academic programs, the committee anticipates that the processes of university-wide planning and assessment will yield deeper, more generative findings to inform work at all levels of the governance system.

**XI. Summary**

Over the course of this Initial Accreditation evaluation, Simon Fraser University has shown itself to be a strong and well-run university, with an effective system of governance, established planning processes that operate with appropriate input and review by relevant constituencies, and an admirable culture of communication and openness. As a candidate for membership in the NWCCU, Simon Fraser University has redesigned its planning model around the concept of
mission and core themes with the intention of aligning all forms of institutional planning toward the advancement and fulfillment of those institutional values.

The new University Planning Framework has different ramifications for the administrative and academic areas of the institution. For administrative areas, this shift is already contributing to a more strategic approach to existing practices of ongoing planning, assessment, and improvement. For academic programs, however, the adoption of NWCCU standards is calling for new forms of educational assessment—specifically, the identification of student learning outcomes and means of determining whether and how well the university is achieving its educational goals. This major change will enable the university to conduct more substantive inquiry into students’ educational experience, one that will inform the process of planning, assessing and improving the quality of its educational programs. Once that new approach is fully implemented, the university should be able to develop more illuminating insights into how and how well it is enacting its core themes—engaging students, most particularly.

XII. Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations:

1. Simon Fraser University is commended for the integrity with which it has demonstrated the serious commitment needed to pursue accreditation through the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. This approach has honored the centrality of the faculty governance process in maintaining academic freedom and also endorsed the importance of developing a culture of learning outcomes assessment within the University.

2. The University is commended for its innovative, faculty-led approach to supporting professional growth and faculty development through the Institute for the Study of Teaching and Learning in the Disciplines. This Institute engages instructors in teaching as a socially situated practice, a unique and laudable goal.

3. Simon Fraser University is commended for its comprehensive institutional planning framework that integrates ongoing and participatory planning across sectors of the University and underscores the relationship of these efforts to the institution's shared vision, mission, and goals.

4. The University is commended for an impressive level of transparency, respectful communication, and collegial and mutually supportive environment.

5. The University is commended for a remarkably rich and varied array of community engagement programs that reflect and underscore the mission and vision of the institution. Simon Fraser University has succeeded in outreach and engagement with community organizations, alumni, and individuals from across the region. Through its three campuses and community engagement efforts, the University has integrated itself into the community and nurtured long-term partnerships.
Continuing Recommendations (2015)

1. The Commission recommends that the institution identify and publish expected course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Expected student learning outcomes for courses, wherever offered and however delivered, are provided in written form to enrolled students (Standard 2.C.2).

2. The Commission recommends that Simon Fraser University undertake the necessary steps toward ensuring that the General Education components of its baccalaureate degree programs have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes that are stated in relation to the institution’s mission and learning outcomes for those programs (Standard 2.C.10)

Recommendations:

1. The Evaluation Committee recommends that the institution develop indicators and metrics across all levels of the University to more fully assess accomplishment of core theme goals through the collection of appropriately defined data (Standard 1.B.2; 3.B.3; 4.A.1).

2. The Evaluation Committee recommends that the University benchmark to the higher end of its goal for the key performance indicator defined as “net operating reserves as a percent of revenues” in order to ensure sufficient resources to support its programs and services (Standard 2.F.1).

3. The University has done substantial emergency and disaster planning and promulgated the resulting plans to the community. The Evaluation Committee recommends that still more be done, such as annual drills and threat assessments, to ensure the preparedness of all community members (Standard 3.A.5).