SFU Academic Plan
2010 to 2013

Jon Driver, Vice-President, Academic,
February 2010
1. Introduction and Context

Simon Fraser University has experienced considerable growth during the last decade. A new campus in Surrey and new buildings in Burnaby and Vancouver accommodate a larger student population. New residences and UniverCity have transformed the ambience of Burnaby Mountain. Hundreds of new faculty and staff positions have been created and hundreds more new faces have replaced retirees. New programs have been developed and Faculties have been reorganized. Research funding and output have increased dramatically and dozens of research chairs have been appointed. Surveys, external reviews and accreditation processes of various kinds suggest that we have a good reputation nationally and internationally.

As we move into the second decade of the 21st century the environment is changing. In BC the population of 18 to 24 year olds is stabilizing at a time when many new universities have been founded. We can expect a reduced rate of growth in the traditional student population and more interest in post-secondary education from mid-career students and new immigrants, who may have diverse educational goals. Confidence in the world economy has declined, as have returns from investments, and this will affect funding from governments and donors. At the same time, there is increased recognition that Canada must have a well-educated population in order to meet many future challenges to our society and environment.

This slowdown in growth and funding provides us with an opportunity to think about the future of the University in two ways. First, we can revitalize SFU by reflecting on our collective purpose. How can we best meet the educational needs of our students? How does our research benefit the communities that support it? Second, we should consider how the University as an institution can become sustainable. This must include a solution to our financial problems. However, being distinctive is an important component of sustainability — what makes each of our programs and the University as a whole outstanding? What is our role in the post-secondary system in British Columbia? These two considerations will permeate the planning that we undertake over the next few years.

The University relies on two primary sources of revenues: government grants tied to student numbers and tuition fees. For planning purposes we must assume that the provincial government does not intend to raise the grant per student and that our enrollment targets will not change significantly (although we will lobby for changes in both of these). We must also assume that tuition fees will be regulated, and that their rate of increase will be below the overall inflation rate of the University’s expenses. In other words, our operating expenses will rise faster than our revenues, and we face a significant cut to the academic budget every year unless we get expenses under control and/or find new revenues.

In a time of funding restraint we will have difficult decisions to make. For many areas of the University the only opportunity for change will be through re-allocation of resources, and this re-allocation will have to be based on the alignment of a unit’s priorities with those of the University. For this reason, it is important that planning take place at all levels, and that broad discussion and consultation occur as priorities are set. Every academic and support unit on campus should be preparing to evaluate how it can improve its service to students, where it wishes to take its research, and the role it plays in the wider community.

The Academic Plan for 2010-2013 provides a set of priorities for the University, developed from a vision and a set of preferred outcomes that resulted from consultations across the University. The
Plan respects the expert knowledge and autonomy of Faculties and avoids as far as possible being prescriptive at the disciplinary level.

2. Planning Process

The Academic Plan results from a number of processes and influences.

First, there have been two important task force reports that have resulted from extensive consultation with the University community. "Removing Barriers: a Design for the Future of SFU" was completed in late 2007 and some of its recommendations regarding University structure were approved by Senate in 2008 and implemented in 2009 when new Faculties were created and some existing Faculties were reorganized. However, other recommendations have yet to be implemented. Second, the Task Force on Teaching and Learning has generated widespread discussion and the implementation of its recommendations will have far-reaching effects.

Second, this Academic Plan has also been informed by a range of surveys that indicate that we could improve the student experience at SFU. While one may dispute the methods used in some surveys, there is considerable congruence in their results, and an indication that students currently studying at SFU are dissatisfied with some aspects of their experience. These surveys have been reinforced recently by the results of our first experience of participation in NSSE – the National Survey of Student Engagement – that indicates SFU falling below average in some measures that are widely accepted as best practice in undergraduate education. Although I do not want to lessen the importance of these surveys, I think it is vital not to see these results as indicative of failure. Surveys of alumni demonstrate that SFU graduates report levels of overall satisfaction that are quite high and that are consistent with results at other BC universities. We also know that our students achieve considerable success while at SFU. Some surveys, such as NSSE, will indicate areas where we could improve our practices; other surveys may show that we have failed to communicate to students what is expected in a university education.

Third, the Plan has been influenced by a consultation process that took place early in 2009, and resulted in a document “SFU Academic Vision, Outcomes and VPA Goals for 2013” that was designed to influence the development of three-year plans for departments, schools, Faculties and support units.

Fourth, using the above document, each area of the VP Academic portfolio developed a three-year plan and submitted it to the Vice-President, Academic in October 2009. These plans were discussed at a retreat of Deans, where a number of common themes emerged.

Fifth, the Plan is influenced by enrollment and budget projections for the next three years, and the issues described briefly in the Introduction and Context (above).

The implementation of this plan will be influenced by any other SFU strategic planning that may emerge as well as the priorities of the new President.

This plan should be seen as a living document that may be altered from time to time to suit SFU’s dynamic environment. The plan will be reviewed at least annually as progress in achieving these goals and objectives is assessed and reported to the university community. Each Faculty will be asked to report annually on progress being made in the implementation of their plans and indicate how their plans are achieving the goals and objectives of this three year academic plan. Where possible, metrics will be used to reflect performance.
3. The Academic Vision

As noted above, the "SFU Academic Vision, Outcomes and VPA Goals for 2013" set the context for departmental and Faculty planning. The Vision and Outcomes were discussed and debated at an open meeting and during Senate, evaluated by Deans, and discussed at meetings between the senior administration and employee groups. In this section I provide an academic vision for SFU that describes the general characteristics of academic life at the University.

**SFU’s Academic Vision**

To be the University of choice which integrates teaching and learning, research, and engagement with the community and achieves high standards in both the fundamental and applied disciplines. It is an intellectually stimulating and culturally vibrant environment that:

- Defines scholarship as the creation, advancement, application, transmission and preservation of knowledge, and the stimulation of critical and independent thinking.

- Commits to excellence in teaching, learning, research and community engagement in a wide spectrum of academic disciplines across our 8 Faculties, with a particular emphasis on multidisciplinarity and the ability to anticipate or respond to emerging areas of higher education demand.

- Provides a global perspective with a local orientation and is an active and highly valued partner in the social, cultural and economic life of our communities.

- Enables students to reach their goals and potential and become ethical, responsible and informed citizens.

- Employs effective, efficient, and innovative approaches to teaching, learning, research, service and administration.

4. The Academic Mission and Themes 2010-2013

The academic mission provides a more specific set of goals for the next three to four years. Five themes are identified, based on the "Outcomes" developed through earlier consultation, and each theme has a number of goals and objectives. Because some themes overlap, some objectives may be relevant to more than one theme.
SFU’s Academic Mission (2010 – 2013)

We will provide high quality learning opportunities for our students across our 8 Faculties. During this period we will improve the quality of the student experience, maximize our current strengths and develop new directions in teaching and research, as well as make the University more relevant to all the communities that we serve.

Five themes have been identified to structure our activities to ensure we achieve our mission. Each of the themes contains a set of more detailed goals and objectives, described below, and indicators or measures of achievement and expected outcomes are included in Appendix A. A summary of the contributions to be made by the Faculties and support units to this plan have been included in Appendix B.

The themes are:

1. High Quality Student Experience
2. Teaching and Learning in a Research university
3. Research Intensity
4. The University’s Role in the Community
5. Financial Sustainability and Institutional Strength

The objectives under each of the Goals are not meant to limit opportunities and initiatives and Deans and others are encouraged to undertake any action that would assist in achieving the Goal.

Theme 1: High Quality Student Experience

The University will facilitate admission, support and success for students from diverse backgrounds. Students will know the learning purposes and opportunities for each program, can find straightforward information on program requirements, and can plan and complete their programs in a timely way. SFU graduates will understand the importance of being ethical, responsible and informed citizens, through engaging in complex contemporary issues and examining questions from different perspectives.

The goals and supporting objectives for this theme include:

Goal 1.1 - Create multiple admission routes to attract a diverse student body.

Supporting objectives and actions:

✓ Increase current numbers of First Nations Students by 10% by 2013
✓ Increase number and diversity of students enrolled in bridge and university preparation programmes including FIC, the Aboriginal Bridge Program, the English Language and Culture Programme and the English Bridge Programme.
 ✓ Increase current SFU NOW enrollment by 10% by 2013.
 ✓ Find opportunities to facilitate admission for qualified students from partner institutions
 ✓ Encourage greater diversity in graduate student admissions

**Goal 1.2 - Increase the retention rates of all students.**

*Supporting objectives and actions*

 ✓ Improve the retention rates of students in all years by:
   - Expand the scope of the Student Success Programmes and Student Learning Commons programmes.
   - Encouraging all Faculties to offer mentoring to undergraduate students.
   - Ensuring that best practices in graduate student supervision are followed
   - Improve financial support for undergraduate and graduate students.

**Goal 1.3 - Develop a more navigable curriculum and improve course access.**

*Supporting objectives and actions:*

 ✓ Streamline our undergraduate curriculum:
   - Reduce the ‘course-turn-away’ rates.
   - Review and simplify routes to credentials
   - Review and removing unnecessary barriers to programme completion
   - Review and standardize honours programs
   - Publish multi-term timetables
   - Create direct entry and cohort options
   - Explore the feasibility of ‘open admission’ for mature students.

**Goal 1.4 - Diversify our pedagogy.**

*Supporting objectives and actions:*

 ✓ Review and implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Teaching and Learning
 ✓ Define learning outcomes for each course and programme
 ✓ Increase the professional development opportunities for Instructors and Teaching Assistants
 ✓ Increase the Semester in Dialogue type courses in all Faculties
 ✓ Provide and recognize for credit more experiential learning opportunities.
 ✓ Develop multidisciplinary opportunities for graduate study.
Goal 1.5 - Increase our International, First Nations and interdisciplinary exposure.

Supporting objectives and actions:

- Increase the number of field schools and international internship opportunities
- Begin implementation of the First Nations Strategic Plan
- Increase the number of courses concerning the study of First Nations.
- Increase the number of ‘team teaching’ courses
- Make Joint Faculty/Department appointments where feasible
- Review all policies that seem to block interdisciplinary activity
- Develop new interdisciplinary graduate programmes

Theme 2: Teaching and Learning in a Research university

SFU respects and values diversity in scholarship; academic units define their own research and pedagogical strengths and plan accordingly. SFU faculty members will create a culture of critical inquiry and their transmission of research skills and research results will add value to each student’s education. Students will learn through a wide variety of pedagogies that expand the traditional classroom experience and extend learning into local, national and international communities. They will participate in a wide variety of experiences that develop long-term skills in learning, analysis and communication.

Goal 2.1 - Support new program development in select areas.

Supporting objectives and actions:

- Complete the development of planned Health Sciences programmes.
- Complete the development of planned Environment programmes.
- Evaluate all new programme proposals against student demand, synergy with strengths and existing programmes, as well as budget.
- Examine opportunities for partnerships with other institutions.

Goal 2.2 - Review curriculum for learning outcomes and linkages to faculty research.

Supporting objectives and actions:

- Learning outcomes to be defined for each course/programme – see also Goal 1.4
- Build research experiences into undergraduate curriculum
- Link Faculty research strengths to undergraduate curriculum.
- Build new graduate programmes that complement research strengths
Goal 2.3 - Increase student exposure to research and researchers.

Supporting objectives and actions:

✓ Rebalance course delivery by increasing the number of courses taught by tenure track faculty and reducing reliance on other teaching appointments
✓ Encourage all Departments to offer more courses where research opportunities are part of the curricula
✓ Encourage all Departments to increase the number of capstone undergraduate courses they offer
✓ Encourage all Departments to develop informal research opportunities, e.g. colloquia, journal clubs
✓ Make honours programmes more accessible (see Goal 1.3).
✓ Create more opportunities for undergraduate students to learn from graduate students

Theme 3: Research Intensity

We will support and pursue national and international research initiatives.

Goal 3.1 - Support the SFU Strategic Research Plan 2010-2015

The major objectives contained in Strategic Research Plan are:

✓ Maximize opportunities for discovery and innovation;
✓ Promote internationally competitive research and scholarship;
✓ Cultivate excellence through selective investment in emerging areas of research;
✓ Facilitate collaborations across disciplinary and institutional boundaries;
✓ Recruit and retain outstanding students, research fellows, and faculty;
✓ Encourage effective communication and dissemination of research results;
✓ Optimize use of our research and scholarship resources;
✓ Recognize the full value of intellectual property;
✓ Achieve thematic coherence in the expression of SFU’s research interests;
✓ Engage all our communities for the benefit of society.
# Theme 4: The University’s Role in the Community

Academic units will make their teaching and research relevant to the broader community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 4.1 - Develop closer ties with First Nations and immigrant communities.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting objectives and actions:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Increase ties/partnerships with First Nations communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Increase ties/partnerships with immigrant communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 4.2 - Ensure that non-credit programs reflect the University’s strategic priorities.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting objectives and actions:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Review non-credit programs for relationship to SFU strategic strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Create collaborations between Continuing Studies and Faculties for non-credit instruction development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Explore opportunities for integration of portions of credit and non-credit programmes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 4.3 - Provide opportunities for students to learn and apply knowledge in local and global communities.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting objectives and actions:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Increase learning opportunities within local communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Increase number of international learning opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Encourage graduate student research in local and international communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 4.4 - Work more closely with alumni.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting objectives and actions:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Involve alumni in the student experience by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Using alumni as advisors/mentors where possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Supporting more alumni events.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Goal 4.5 - Link each of our three campuses closely to their communities.**

*Supporting objectives and actions:*

- Increase integration of campuses in communities by:
  - Involving community members as advisors to Academic Units
  - Conducting community relevant research projects
  - Collaborate with communities to develop research partnerships
  - Increasing communication with local communities.
  - Provide student learning and research opportunities in local communities
  - Support distinctive non-credit programmes in local communities

**Theme 5: Financial Sustainability and Institutional Strength**

We will work towards a financial system with increased revenue flows and no structural deficit. We will attract, retain, develop and reward the best faculty & staff.

**Goal 5.1 - Create a comprehensive Strategic Enrollment Management Plan.**

*Supporting objectives and actions:*

- Evaluate and implement the recommendation made by the Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Planning Group (also supports Goal 1.2)
- Meet all agreed enrollment targets.

**Goal 5.2 - Centralize support activities to reduce costs.**

*Supporting objectives and actions:*

- Review support activities in the VPA portfolio to identify where savings can be achieved and duplication minimized.

**Goal 5.3 - Support credit and non-credit revenue-generating activities.**

*Supporting objectives and actions:*

- Encourage Faculties to create revenue generating credit and non-credit programmes in areas that complement their existing strengths
- Review and restructure revenue generating programmes in Continuing Studies
- Review revenue sharing plans/opportunities with Faculties
- Review other revenue generating operations e.g. MECS, Summer Camps
- Review the cost/benefits of increasing numbers of international students.
Goal 5.4 - Encourage greater financial efficiency.

Supporting objectives and actions:

✓ Develop processes and incentives to encourage mergers of academic units or support service units
✓ Develop incentives to reward implementation of efficiencies
✓ Ensure all recouped funding is reallocated on widely communicated principles that are based on the achievement of the Goals included in this plan.
✓ Continue to seek ways and means of aligning budget allocations with our Goals.

Goal 5.5 – Intensify Fund Raising efforts.

Supporting objectives and actions:

✓ Increase cooperation with Advancement in attracting endowments
✓ Prioritize fund raising that reduces pressure on the Operating Budget.

Goal 5.6 - Review graduate tuition and support.

Supporting objectives and actions:

✓ Review graduate tuition level and structure in view of programme length variations
✓ Review financial support for graduate students in light of differential research intensity of programmes.

Goal 5.7 – Recruit, retain, develop and reward the best faculty and staff.

Supporting objectives and actions:

✓ Recruit high caliber faculty to meet the approved Faculty Renewal Plan/s.
✓ Encourage the mentoring of new and mid-career faculty in the full range of professional responsibilities, including administrative roles such as chairs and directors.
✓ Provide high quality development opportunities for faculty to enhance their teaching and research skills.
✓ Support the retention and enhancement of support staff.

Goal 5.8 - Communicate plans and achievements internally and externally.

Supporting objectives and actions:

✓ Develop a communications strategy and plan to address internal and external stakeholders
5. Implications for Financial Planning

Financial sustainability is extremely important to everyone at SFU. We are determined to ensure we continue to provide high quality teaching and learning but must manage inflation of between 3 and 4% without any associated revenue increase.

As provincially funded student enrollment has now reached an almost steady state with only minor increases in enrollment being expected in this planning horizon, any growth in tuition revenue will come from the enrollment of international students or the over enrollment of domestic students (where only the tuition fees will accrue). This limitation together with the ceiling placed on tuition fee increases has resulted in a large part of this plan focusing on developing capacity to generate revenue, increase our operational efficiency and to contain costs.

Under the current economic climate the planned activities in this three year plan are going to be strongly aligned to the VPA budget allocation each year. Therefore any changes to the SFU revenue drivers which directly impact the VPA portfolio budget could influence our ability to achieve these objectives.

As little or no new funding will become available in this planning horizon it is expected that all units will realign their current base budget allocations to support the Goals of this plan.

6. Implications of/for Faculty Renewal

We need to ensure that faculty resources are in place and supported to enable SFU to meet its teaching and research commitments. It is appreciated how difficult this is under the current financial conditions but we must continue to make the very best search decisions to ensure highly competent and effective faculty remain a strength of SFU.

Planned growth in the faculty complement will only take place in the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Faculty of Environment. Any other additional appointments will depend heavily on external funding arrangements, revenue generation or savings made from efficiencies that have been realized.

As faculty positions become vacant the positions will be returned to the Vice President, Academic and a decision will be made to either fill the position in its original Faculty or Department, transfer the position to another Faculty or Department based on strategic requirements or eliminate the position entirely. The decision-making process will be based on principles and will be communicated widely (see 5.4).
7. Conclusion

Although we can expect relatively little growth over the next few years, we should be planning for change. We have to change some of our practices in order to cope with the financial situation, but also to deal with issues that students have identified, such as improving course accessibility and the learning experience. Within British Columbia and Canada, we must maintain our reputation as a research-intensive university, and we should explore ways of making our research more accessible and relevant to students and our local communities.

In an institution where faculty members and staff members are already working very hard, we must ensure that change involves the replacement of some activities with others, and not the imposition of new work on top of old. That will involve creativity and participation, and a willingness to imagine new ways of fulfilling our responsibilities as educators and researchers.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Academic Plan 2010 - 2013 – Indicators
Appendix B - Faculty Contribution Summaries.