“REMOVING BARRIERS: A DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE OF SFU”

Phase 2 Task Force on Academic Structure Discussion Paper

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from the members of the Phase 2 Task Force on Academic Structure

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VOLUME I – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Setting the Stage

In 1965, Simon Fraser University opened its doors to its first students, faculty, and staff. Since those beginnings only slightly more than 40 years ago, Simon Fraser University has grown into an internationally recognized, comprehensive research institution with about 30 Departments and Schools, six Faculties, more than 18,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate students and 3,000 FTE graduate students, a faculty complement of approximately 900 FTE, and a staff complement of approximately 2,000 FTE.

The growth of the University has been extraordinary over the past decade alone, and we have witnessed dramatic changes in the range and scope of academic activities within the University including the expansion of our activities to span four campuses. We have also experienced significant changes in the external social, political, demographic, fiscal and intellectual contexts. During these changes we have, consistent with our legacy, kept our eye on the future to ensure that we are able to make meaningful contributions to society and the world in which we live through our research, teaching and outreach.

It is in the context of these forces that in October 2005, the Vice President, Academic created a Faculty Structure Task Force (hereinafter referred to as the Phase 1 Task Force) to examine the question:

Is Simon Fraser University’s current academic structure one that best reflects our qualities and strengths and one that will enable us to most effectively and visibly advance our strategic goals?

Notably, this review did not occur within a context of financial crisis, crisis of reputation, or crisis of vision, often typical of restructuring exercises at other academic institutions.

After a year of detailed study and review, the Phase 1 Task Force concluded that “the University should consider and thoroughly examine the potential of alternative academic configurations, structures and/or systems of support” (p. 2).

And thus, on the basis of the Phase 1 Task Force findings, Senate approved the establishment of a Phase 2 Task Force on Academic Structure in November 2006. The mandate of this second phase was threefold:

1. Consider and evaluate proposals from the University community as well as those developed by the Phase 2 Task Force itself, and, following exploration and consultation

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1 Campuses include Burnaby Mountain campus, Surrey campus, Vancouver campus (which includes Harbour Centre, the Wosk Centre for Dialogue, the Segal Graduate School of Business, and the various Contemporary Arts studio facilities in the downtown eastside) and the Kamloops campus. We also have a presence at the Great Northern Way Campus, but due to the joint institutional nature of this development we have not claimed it as an SFU campus in this report.
with the University community, recommend to Senate an overall academic unit configuration for Simon Fraser University;

2. Consider and evaluate the coherence, roles, responsibilities, functions, administrative requirements, costs, and terminology of the structural building blocks employed at Simon Fraser University (i.e. programs, schools, departments, centres, and institutes) and, following exploration and consultation with the University community, recommend to Senate a strategy that will provide definitional clarity, administrative effectiveness, and appropriate differentiation among these structures; and,

3. Consider and evaluate the University’s effectiveness in incubating, facilitating, and supporting interdisciplinary research and programming and, following exploration and consultation with the University community, recommend structural and/or policy changes that will enhance interdisciplinary innovation in the future.

Senate also approved from the Phase 1 Task Force Final Report, eight principles and a procedural framework to guide the Phase 2 Task Force in its work. The principles and procedural framework are captured as Appendix A and B, respectively, to this report.

Designing SFU for 2025

The Phase 1 Task Force conducted its initial assessment of whether Simon Fraser University should further delve into issues of academic structure and interdisciplinarity in view of what the University should strive to be by the year 2025. Their vision is presented as Appendix C. Since the release of the Final Report of the Phase 1 Task Force in November 2006, there have been several significant developments in the external context.

First, in April 2007, Jeff Plant, QC, and Special Advisor to the BC Provincial Government, released a report entitled “Campus 2020 / Thinking Ahead: The Report” with the subtitle – “Access and Excellence, The Campus 2020 Plan for British Columbia’s Post-Secondary Education System”. This report lays out a series of targets for the provincial government that the author argues must be achieved if the government is to realize its “Great Goal” which aims to make British Columbia “the best educated, most literate jurisdiction” in North America by 2015 (Campus 2020, p. 3). Important among these targets for the Phase 2 Task Force are:

- “By 2010, BC will consistently be one of the three highest spending provinces in terms of provincial support for basic and applied research.
- By 2015, BC will achieve the highest level of participation in post-secondary education per capita in Canada, confer more post-secondary credentials per capita than any other province and rank top in the country on quality measures focused on student achievement.” (Campus 2020, p. 3)

The report argues that regional access must remain an imperative and that, to the extent possible “as we move down the path to 2020, we must ensure that the opportunity to learn close to home continues to be a core imperative of higher education.” (Campus 2020, p. 4)
With such a prominent commitment to post-secondary participation, Simon Fraser University must ensure that all of its programs are seen as a first choice for outstanding undergraduate and graduate students. The University has demonstrated its commitment historically, and through recent initiatives, to offer an unparalleled educational experience for students. At the undergraduate level, initiatives such as the Student Learning Commons, the undergraduate curriculum initiative (W-Q-B), the cohort approach to learning at the Surrey campus and in first year programming (Explorations, TechOne, and Science One), our innovations in pedagogical delivery as exemplified by the Semester in Dialogue, the joint-degree program in Computing Science, and proposed international experiential programs in Business Administration and Arts and Social Sciences, are all exemplary of this commitment. Further, our trimester operations, tutorial system, and flexible programming structures all signify our commitment to a unique undergraduate educational experience. At the graduate level, Simon Fraser University has established a strong record of excellence in disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies across the University. Our outstanding researchers, world-class Chairs, and research success as demonstrated by research council and other support, all provide a top-level graduate learning environment. We recognize these successes, but also believe that we can do more. The Task Force proposes additional structures and initiatives in this report that we believe will build on the past successes of Simon Fraser University and will ensure that we offer one of the best educational experiences and learning environments for undergraduate and graduate students in the country, attracting the highest quality students from around the world.

The Campus 2020 report further notes that academic excellence must be the cornerstone of the province’s post-secondary educational strategy: “Our research-intensive institutions must continue to be the key incubators of the innovation needed to address our most pressing social and environmental challenges and to develop a strong economy. They must also be places of teaching excellence, and they must be destinations of choice for the best and brightest students from across the province and around the world.” (Campus 2020, p. 4) The imperative of serving as an incubator of innovation as we address pressing social and environmental challenges is an important motivational underpinning for the ultimate recommendations found within this Phase 2 Task Force report. The Task Force believes that the additions we offer to structural building blocks to enable incubation and adaptability, the areas of new focus for the University that we recommend through alignment of academic units and new program creation, and the multifaceted strategy we suggest for interdisciplinarity, will help Simon Fraser University play a fundamental role as an incubator of innovation and as a place for addressing pressing social and environmental challenges in our changing world.

A second recent contextual change is the appearance of a new tiering of the Canadian University system. Universities that consider themselves to be Tier 1 are typically those research-intensive institutions with medical schools. However, recently the University of Waterloo has become part of the Tier 1 league. We are concerned that the tiering of Canadian Universities may have a direct impact on the way in which universities generally are able to participate in, and exert influence upon, provincial, national and, potentially even, international research agendas. We must ensure that Simon Fraser University is widely recognized nationally and internationally as a Tier 1 University should the tiering that appears to be on the horizon actually take hold within the Canadian post-secondary context. As a consequence, we believe that it is imperative for
Simon Fraser University’s research excellence to be better profiled and better facilitated, especially in the most pressing areas of societal need such as health and the environment. Further, as the future of research success is comprehensively intertwined with excellence in graduate education, we believe we should look for opportunities to significantly expand our graduate offerings and more effectively involve graduate students in our research activities.

A third contextual change that deserves noting is the increasing profile and attention to issues of environmental concern. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize this past month to a group including Al Gore for drawing attention to issues of global warming and climate change is illustrative of the level of societal importance and the inescapable conclusion that the world must become urgently proactive in discovering and studying solutions to environmental problems. It did not go unnoticed by the Task Force that within a day of the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize, universities across Canada rushed to report in local and national newspapers the members of their faculty who have been actively involved in the various national and international global change programs and related initiatives.

A fourth recent development in the external environment is the noticeable move by universities and funding agencies internationally over the past 5-10 years to integrate knowledge communities in an effort to enhance knowledge creation and address socially relevant global issues. The transformation of the Canadian Medical Council into the interdisciplinary Canadian Institutes for Health Research, the United States National Research Council’s 2001 study and identification of the eight “Grand Challenges” confronting the large Environmental Observatories, the multi-billion dollar initiative by Stanford University to develop four multidisciplinary initiatives\(^2\), the blossoming of a literature, and perhaps the appearance of a nascent field of study in interdisciplinary pedagogy, is in evidence.

Within the Canadian University sector, there are signs of response. As examples, we have seen in 2007 alone the creation of a semi-virtual College of Interdisciplinarity at the University of British Columbia, and the development of three new virtual Interdisciplinary Schools at the University of Saskatchewan. We have also seen an increase in program funding envelopes with criteria seeking demonstration of interdisciplinary research teams. All of these are testament to the changing intellectual context. And while some skeptics may view these developments as the trend of the “00s”, the President of Stanford University, Dr. John Hennessy, has argued\(^3\) that the transformation of knowledge and understanding by multidisciplinarity will be as revolutionizing as technology has been over the past two decades. The Task Force believes that there is compelling evidence to support his prediction.

Fifth and finally, the Task Force has observed a significant shift in the positioning of major United States institutions towards expanded engagement, connectivity, and efforts to be relevant to communities and individuals around the world. It is apparent that the major US Universities are looking outwards and are taking their obligation to be socially responsible to a scale, and in

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\(^2\) The initiatives are: (1) The Initiative on Human Health, (2) The Initiative on the Environment and Sustainability, (3) The International Initiative and (4) The Arts Initiative: Engaging the Arts and Creativity (see website for further details http://multi.stanford.edu/initiatives/).

\(^3\) This was a report of his words by Dr. Roberta Katz, Associate Vice President for Strategic Planning, Stanford University.
ways, previously unimagined. Two examples are indicative of these trends. With regard to expanded community engagement, we note that Arizona State University, which recently launched its mission to set “The Golden Standard” for universities in the United States, has as two of only eight design imperatives “societal transformation – where the ASU will be a force, not only a place” and “social embeddedness – where the goal is to diffuse the boundaries between the University and the community that it serves”. (ASU website http://mynew.asu.edu/)

We have also noticed significant initiatives in the resuscitation of the arts and culture as a key role for, and responsibility of, universities. An example of the revival in arts and culture is evidenced by Stanford University, who, in response to demand by external donors and friends of the University, have set as one of their four multidisciplinary initiatives, “The Arts Initiative: Engaging the Arts and Creativity”. This initiative was commenced in 2006. Coordinated through the Stanford Institute for Creativity and the Arts, the Institute has been mandated to “act as the nerve center for the development of new undergraduate arts programs, hosting artists in residence, administering new multidisciplinary graduate degree programs, awarding grants for multidisciplinary arts research and teaching, incubating collaborative performances and exhibitions and providing centralized communication”. (Stanford website http://multi.stanford.edu/initiatives/)

Within the context of these above five observations, the more detailed internal and external context framework provided in the Final Report of the Phase 1 Task Force, the analysis and recommendations of the five Academic Structure Working Groups, and the feedback received from the University community, the Phase 2 Task Force has concluded that we must design Simon Fraser University for 2025 so that it will emblemize four key qualities. We note that many of these attributes are currently in evidence in various areas of the University. We recognize these strengths and aim to build upon them.

(1) Faculty members will see Simon Fraser University as a place where they can effectively pursue disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge discovery, application, and practice of their art; where they can easily share their discoveries, applications and arts with colleagues and communities; where they are able to identify and engage with colleagues with whom they wish to collaborate; where their energy and creativity for programmatic and research innovation will find incubation, support and development; and where this environment will lead to the attraction and retention of a world-class academic complement.

(2) Graduate students will see Simon Fraser University as a place where they are afforded an expanded range of outstanding programmatic options; where there is a diverse range of opportunities for disciplinary and interdisciplinary courses of study; where they are intimately connected with the research agenda and activities of the University; and where this combination will continue our success in recruiting superb students interested in pursuing advanced exploration of disciplines and interdisciplines.

(3) The design of our undergraduate programs will be recognizably distinct and of exceptional quality providing students with life-changing experiences, a wide range of opportunities to study within, and at the intersections of, disciplines, and which,
therefore, will continue to attract students of the highest caliber from local, national and international origins.

(4) Our communities, both locally and internationally, will see Simon Fraser University as a place where we fulfill our social responsibility to provide learning opportunities to all members of society through a comprehensive collection of programming that spans non-credit and credit learning; where we actively pursue and contribute to understanding and knowledge development concerning the social and environmental problems of the world; and where we provide our students with opportunities to learn with others and participate in initiatives in communities around the world.

As we develop our recommendations, we will strive to build upon our existing strengths and accomplishments and ensure that, throughout Simon Fraser University, these qualities are showcased.

Structure of Our Report

Given the significant ground to be covered over the course of our threefold mandate, the Task Force has decided to organized our report into volumes. These are necessarily interrelated, but can also stand as topic focused sub-reports.

Volume II – Major Structural Change: This volume provides the core recommendations of the Task Force with regard to changes in the academic structure - the creation of three new Faculties, the disbanding of the Faculty of Applied Sciences, the creation of a new College of Lifelong and Experiential Learning, and a proposal for the development of a Simon Fraser University Institute for Advanced Scholarship.

Volume III – Interdisciplinarity: In this volume, the Task Force identifies the successes of Simon Fraser University to date in supporting interdisciplinarity, highlights existing barriers to effective pursuit of interdisciplinary teaching and research, and lays out a multifaceted strategy for improved facilitation, nurturing and incubation of interdisciplinary initiatives.

Volume IV – Programs, Processes and Other Activities: This volume presents the Task Force’s recommendations related to specific programs such as a new IT/ICT Program, TechOne, the Cognitive Science Program, and consolidation of Publishing programs and initiatives. In addition, this volume recommends the creation of several process reviews designed to enhance the student experience. Finally, Volume IV speaks to several issues raised by various areas of the University community in submissions to the Task Force.

Volume V – Academic Structural Elements: Notable in this volume is the definition and conceptualization of a new entity – the College of Lifelong and Experiential Learning – and a sub-category of structure, the College Program. Also of critical importance in this Volume is a re-conceptualization of the Centres and Institutes R40.01 policy envisioned with a considerably more expansive taxonomy (3 categories of Centres and 2 categories of Institutes).
Volume VI – Implementation and Process Forward: This final volume of our report speaks to issues of implementation, costs analysis, impact on individuals, and administrative process. It also importantly identifies the consultation path forward for the consideration and debate of our report and its recommendations.