“Removing Barriers: A Design for the Future of SFU”

Phase 2 Task Force on Academic Structure Discussion Paper

Presented to the University Community
December 17, 2007

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

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VOLUME IV – PROGRAMS, PROCESSES AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

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In Volume II of our report, the Task Force recommended major structural changes to the academic organization of the University. This has included the creation of three new Faculties, a new College, and a proposal for a new Institute for Advanced Scholarship.

This Volume examines four additional areas that came before the Task Force in the submissions we received: specific academic programs, existing structures, process reviews, and infrastructure support.

Specific Academic Program Areas

Cognitive Science Program

As a significant experiment in multidisciplinary collaboration spanning multiple Faculties, the Cognitive Science Program is an exemplar of what can be imagined, and how facilitation of that imagination is constrained. A series of pragmatic and logistical problems in the arrangements of collaboration have resulted in frustrations by both faculty members and students alike. Yet, the Task Force does not believe, at least upon initial investigation, that these problems require structural solution. Rather, we recommend that the commitments made by collaborating units be codified and formalized and that adequate commitment be given in terms of faculty teaching contributions and program service to ensure that program quality can be returned and sustained.

We are aware that the Cognitive Science Program is scheduled for review under the Senate External Review processes in early 2008. This will prove an important and timely review. The Task Force believes that this review provides the opportunity for an objective expert assessment of the issues identified by the Cognitive Science Program in its submission to the Task Force.

Recommendation 14: That there be formalization and adequate commitments given to the Cognitive Science Program by participating units and that the Terms of Reference for the External Review Team of the Cognitive Science Program (scheduled for early 2008) specifically solicit the advice of the review team on the issues identified in the submission by Cognitive Science to the Task Force.

The issues raised by the Cognitive Science Program have led the Task Force to further consider the processes by which new interdisciplinary programs present their proposals through the Senate process and the extent to which the issues the Cognitive Science Program has encountered may have been avoided had the original proposal included more formalized understanding of the expectations surrounding collaboration and the ways in which faculty members and students would be enabled and supported to participate. We suggest that Senate develop a required template to guide the development of interdisciplinary program proposals which would also provide Senate with a framework to ensure appropriate mechanisms for collaboration are envisioned. As part of defining these commitments, we would suggest that the following issues be addressed within that guiding framework:
• plans for the provision and prioritization of student access;
• description of how faculty members who contribute will have their contributions considered as part of annual workload expectations;
• overview as to how academic leadership for the program will be encouraged and supported and what arrangements will be made for recognizing leadership roles;
• identification of what oversight structures will be in place of the program and what accountability structures/processes will be in place to ensure the continued quality of the program; and,
• identification of the composition and reporting structure of the steering committee for the interdisciplinary program and what communication structures will be in place between the steering committee and the collaborating units.

Recommendation 15: That Senate develop a submission template to ensure that sufficient commitments are in place for the development of new interdisciplinary programs and that such a template addresses the issues identified in this report.

IT/ICT Program

As one example of the potential for collaborative engagement with other units at the leading edge of knowledge advancement, the School of Computing Science and the School of Interactive Arts and Technology have developed a joint proposal for a new initiative in Information and Communications Technology (IT/ICT). This program represents a significant turning point in the interrelationship between the School of Computing Science and the School of Interactive Arts and Technology. The proposal from Computing Science and Interactive Arts and Technology calls for a program to be created at the convergence of information and communications technology.\(^1\)

In addition to being an important proposal for the future collaborative relationship between Computing Science and Interactive Arts and Technology, the proposal also draws expertise from, and extends partnership involvement to, Engineering Science, Business Administration, and Cognitive Science. Others may also be interested in this initiative. We can imagine particular interest being expressed from faculty members in Communication and Health. Students from all of these programs would benefit from the expanded collaborative environment, and it is envisioned that specialty streams could be developed within the undergraduate IT/ICT program such that students could then further specialize at the graduate level within the partnership disciplines or perhaps even in a graduate IT/ICT Program. Collaborative opportunities would also be highly likely with industry and the program would be extremely compelling as an object of external financial support, industrial collaboration, and co-op and career placement for students, thus serving our external community and our students in a highly effective way.

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\(^1\) “When combined, information and communications technology focuses on the development and use of computer-based information systems and communications systems to process, transmit, and store data and information. It directs scholarly attention to the human and organization issues of effective technology utilization that move such systems from a domain of engineering complexity to every applications and appliances. The Apple Corporation iPhone is a recent example of this convergence with its intuitive, easy-to-use interface.” (IC/ICT Joint proposal, p. 1)
In recognition of this program’s potential to position Simon Fraser University as a world leader in this emerging field of knowledge (there are currently no other competing programs in Canada and an initial review suggests no direct competition within North America), and in developing a culture of effective collaboration among disciplines within the University, the Task Force supports the development of an IT/ICT program.

**Recommendation 16: That a new “Information and Communications Technology” (IT/ICT) program be collaboratively pursued at Simon Fraser University as follows:**

16.1 A Joint Program Development Committee be established with representatives from Computing Science, Engineering Science, Interactive Arts and Technology, Business Administration, Cognitive Science, and potentially others;

16.2 The IT/ICT Joint Program Development Committee develop a report for consideration by Senate by September 2008 outlining the feasibility, faculty gap analysis, resource requirements and draft curriculum of implementing an IT/ICT program at SFU.

**Publishing Programming Consolidation**

The Working Group and the Task Force support the overall consolidation of publishing programming under one umbrella, and thus the inclusion of the undergraduate publishing courses from Communication and the Writing and Publishing Program from Continuing Studies as part of the Publishing Program in the new Faculty. We understand that the School of Communication and the Director of the Master of Publishing Program are supportive of our view and have agreed to transfer the undergraduate credit publishing courses from Communication to the Publishing Program. In contrast, we have learned that the Director of the Master of Publishing Program and the Director of the Writing and Publishing program at Continuing Studies have agreed to “continue to seek opportunities to complement each other’s efforts and to coordinate offerings” but not to consolidate the Continuing Studies programming into the Publishing Program. As a consequence, the Task Force will not recommend the consolidation of the Writing and Publishing program of Continuing Studies with the Master of Publishing Program programming without a better understanding of the reasons for the decision of the program directors. We do, however, believe that there are compelling arguments to consolidate cognate publishing programs within a single unit and believe this should be reconsidered in the future.

**Recommendation 17: That the undergraduate publishing courses now offered by the School of Communication be consolidated with the Master of Publishing Program and that Continuing Studies publishing programming be further explored for consolidation with the Master of Publishing Program.**
**TechOne Program**

Simon Fraser University’s TechOne program is a model first year cohort experience, providing entering students an introduction into the field of technology and future educational paths in Computing, Engineering, Business Administration, Mechatronics, Interactive Arts and Technology, and Communication. This unique program has been evolving since its inception at the University and it has recently undergone a fairly extensive redesign. The TechOne program which is comprised of six core courses, four interdisciplinary courses and two elective courses, will, by the various recommendations of the Task Force, serve three distinct Faculties. This program’s history has been fraught with challenges in design, in interrelationships with various disciplinary units, and with a series of administrative constraints. Until recently, limited term teaching appointments were offered under the umbrella of the School of Interactive Arts and Technology and seconded to the program. Permanent positions have now been authorized under the appointment of other disciplines but again with the majority of duties seconded to the program.

The Task Force believes that the interdisciplinary, cross-Faculty, nature of this program makes it an ideal candidate for inclusion as an independent College Program within the College of Lifelong and Experiential Learning. Headed by a discipline-based academic steering committee, the program would find a nourishing and supportive home that would encourage interdisciplinarity. Notwithstanding this view and desire by the Task Force, the Steering Committee of the TechOne program has requested that the Task Force instead provide the TechOne program with the opportunity to stabilize its newly designed program and leave it in a familiar environment for a temporary two-year period. On the basis of this request, the Task Force makes the following recommendation:

**Recommendation 18:** That the TechOne Program temporarily be moved to the new Faculty comprised of Contemporary Arts, Communication, Interactive Arts and Technology and Publishing for a two year period. Further, that at the end of two years, the Director of the TechOne program along with the Deans from the Faculty of Engineering and Computing, the new Faculty comprised of Communication, Contemporary Arts, Interactive Arts and Technology and Publishing, the Faculty of Business Administration, and the College of Lifelong and Experiential Learning, will review the status of TechOne and recommend to the Vice-President, Academic the future permanent home for the program. Once the location is agreed to by the Vice-President, Academic, a recommendation would then be forwarded through Senate for approval.

**Existing Structures and Activities**

In examining the various submissions to the Task Force as well as the recommendations made by the Working Groups, there were four occasions where the Task Force concluded that the existing structures, and activities underway were the most effective approach for realizing our goals for 2025.
First, the submission from the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences proposed the “establishment of a Department of First Nations Studies, housed in FASS. This department would take the lead in coordinating activities, programming, and research throughout the University.” The Task Force notes the historically strong contributions to First Nations programming carried out by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, particularly that offered through Simon Fraser University’s Kamloops operations. We also note the two recent programming initiatives before Senate that will lead to the expansion of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences First Nations programming activities. We applaud this historical and recent commitment to First Nations activities. The Task Force is, however, also aware that at the beginning of this year a University-wide First Nations Strategic Plan was developed and ultimately approved by Senate and the Board of Governors. This Strategic Plan provides a coordinating, facilitation and development role for a First Nations office with a senior-level Director position. The Task Force believes that this pan-University structure is the appropriate vehicle for encouraging the development of First Nations programming and understanding in all areas of the University.

Second, in its creation of the notion of a College for the University, Working Group 5 proposed that the portfolio of the Associate Vice-President, Students and International be conceived as a College. The Task Force does not believe that these areas of activity require, or would benefit from, the College structure. The Working Group 5 report had also considered the realignment of the Co-op program into the new College of Lifelong and Experiential Learning on the basis of its direct relationship to experiential learning. The Task Force, however, is of the view that the College must be structured to house those experiential activities that do not fit effectively or are not functioning to their full potential within other structures of the University. The Co-op program went through a significant transformation over the past ten years and is now showing clear signs of successful redevelopment. Further, the recent overhaul of the Students and International portfolio under Nello Angerilli’s stewardship occurred with a thoughtful and integrated design within which Co-op was carefully positioned. The Task Force does not feel therefore that there is a motivating reason to relocate the Co-op program into the new College of Lifelong and Experiential Learning. The College will serve both as a home to experiential learning activities and as a conduit of connection between initiatives housed around the University. We would encourage and expect that the College and Co-op will develop a strong and positive relationship that will sustain both of their success.

Third, while some of the design of our multifaceted strategy to enhance interdisciplinarity at Simon Fraser University has been premised on issues raised by Dr. Rick Gruneau’s proposal to the Task Force for the creation of a new program in Sport, Commerce, Culture and Community, we believe that our recommendations for changes to various policies and to the structural elements, will provide this proposal with the appropriate mechanisms to be successful. As a consequence, we believe that it can be pursued through the existing channels of program development and review within the University.

Fourth, while the Task Force makes a series of recommendations with regard to foreign language learning, we are convinced by the “Report of the Language Instruction Committee” written in 2005 and chaired by Dr. Paul McFetridge, that the issues surrounding English language instruction are significantly different from those of foreign language learning and that they need
to be dealt with separately. We have found the Report to provide a comprehensive and compelling examination of the issues and possible paths forward. As a consequence, we do not wish to retrace an area that has been effectively assessed previously. At the same time we recognize that our recommendation to disaggregate English and foreign language learning currently housed within the Language Training Institute in Linguistics and to relocate only the foreign language component to the new College of Lifelong and Experiential Learning, leaves us with an obligation to address the future of the English language training that is currently offered through the Language Training Institute. It is our recommendation, therefore that the Report authored by Dr. Paul McFetridge and his committee, be revisited by the Vice-President, Academic with the goal of implementing a coherent, consolidated, and sustainable strategy for English language learning at Simon Fraser University.

**Recommendation 19: That the Report of the Language Instruction Committee (2005) be revisited by the Vice-President, Academic with the goal of implementing a coherent, consolidated, and sustainable strategy for English language learning at Simon Fraser University.**

**Process Review**

In some cases, we felt that revisions to the process or policy framework of Simon Fraser University would prove more beneficial to the issue in need of resolution and to the overall cost and administrative efficiency of the institution. Many of these are intimately connected with our recommendations for a multifaceted strategy to enhance interdisciplinarity as described in the previous volume.

**Student Mobility / Course Access Review**

As noted in the previous Volume in the discussion of barriers to interdisciplinarity, we heard of a number of interrelated concerns with regard to the presence of obstacles for effective interdisciplinary study by students. We do not have a sense, nor the expertise, of what the exact scale of the problems reported are or the extent to which the problems noted intersect with other areas of student learning. As a consequence, we believe that those who are expert in the undergraduate student learning experience should engage in an evaluation of these issues.

**Recommendation 20: That a Student Mobility and Course Access Review Committee be established by the Vice-President, Academic to identify barriers to interdisciplinary educational experiences of students. We further recommend that a report of findings, recommendations for improvement, and a plan for implementation, be submitted to Senate by April 2009.**
Graduate Student Interdisciplinary Program Review

In many areas of the Task Force report, we have noted the critical need by the University to increase our profile and activity in graduate education. We applaud President Stevenson’s ambitious goal to have 25% of Simon Fraser University’s student population be comprised of graduate enrolments. Achieving this goal is recognizably an important component of the overall institutional objective to secure Simon Fraser University’s reputation as an outstanding comprehensive research institution. We have recommended elsewhere that graduate students should have a direct and enhanced connection to the research activity of the University through membership in Centres and Institutes. We have also recommended a number of structural recommendations that we believe will set the seeds for an expansion of graduate education in both disciplinary and interdisciplinary venues. We also believe that the changes to the Centres and Institutes policy as well as other structural elements will more effectively enable graduate certificate programs to be imagined and developed. Notwithstanding these important changes to the benefit of graduate education, the Task Force supports the submission by the Dean of Graduate Studies to mandate him to research further the ways in which interdisciplinary programming for graduate students might be fostered.

Recommendation 21: That the Dean of Graduate Studies research and recommend a strategy for supporting and stimulating the development of new interdisciplinary graduate programming and providing financial support to graduate students who undertake interdisciplinary projects. We further recommend that his report be presented to Senate for consideration by September 2009.

Infrastructure Support

A final area of consideration by the Task Force with regard to academic structure, is the examination of those structures of infrastructure support that are affected by the recommendations we have made in other areas.

The only area we can identify of immediate impact is the role of the Network Support Group currently housed within the Faculty of Applied Science. While there have been proposals submitted to us to relocate the Network Support Group (NSG) to the new Faculty of Engineering and Computing, we have also been made aware that the issues in supporting research networks and computing at Simon Fraser University extend beyond the boundaries of the units within the Faculty of Applied Science. As a consequence, we believe that a more systematic and institution-wide review is in order and the Task Force is not equipped, nor does it have the expertise, to conduct this review. Rather, we recommend that it be undertaken under the auspices and direction of the Chief Information Officer of the University. We wish to make clear, however, that we do not believe that research computing should fall under the direct portfolio of the Chief Information Officer. Such computing infrastructure should be positioned within the context of academic disciplines and interdisciplines. However, we feel that identification of the location of the Network Support Group and its mandate would benefit from input external to the Task Force and the NSG.
Recommendation 22: That the Chief Information Officer review the support of network and research computing generally and the Network Support Group housed in the Faculty of Applied Science specifically, and identify the best strategy and location for the management of network and research computing for the University’s future.