Some 9,000 delegates attended the United Nations-sponsored World Urban Forum (WUF) that took place in June 2006 in Vancouver. When the event was over they took back home with them fresh ideas for improving the lot of the rapidly growing number of people who live in cities. Many of those ideas came from SFU faculty, staff and students who were prominent at WUF workshops, roundtables, talks, tours and other related events.

Front and centre at the Forum was geographer Dr. Mark Roseland, Director of SFU's Centre for Sustainable Community Development. On the weekend before the formal opening, the Centre hosted a workshop on local economic development. “We also presented two workshops for the World Planners’ Congress, one on market mechanisms for sustainable community development and the other on site control,” added Dr. Roseland.

These events and others such as the International Researchers’ Roundtable on Planning and Managing Sustainable Cities gave Dr. Roseland and his Centre colleagues an opportunity to elaborate on their community capital framework. “It’s an asset-based approach to community sustainability,” Dr. Roseland explains. “We talk about six different forms of community capital – natural or environmental, physical (buildings, equipment, infrastructure), economic, human (health, education, skills, etc.), social (relationships, networks, shared knowledge) and cultural (traditions, customs, values, identity, history). The model encourages communities to build on their assets, rather than focus only on deficiencies.”

Dr. Roseland wrote a book on this topic, entitled Toward Sustainable Communities: Resources for Citizens and their Governments. He’s been invited to prepare a chapter on strengthening local economies, which he previewed in a presentation at the Forum, for the Washington, DC-based Worldwatch Institute’s 2007 report, State of the World: An Urban Planet. After the Forum, he convened a workshop on climate and energy challenges in cities with Urban Studies colleagues Anthony Perl and Meg Holden. Delegates to the Forum also took time away from the formal sessions to tour the UniverCity development on Burnaby Mountain with SFU Community Trust Director Michael Geller. Dr. Roseland is on the Trust’s Board.

For more information on the Centre, visit www.sfu.ca/cscd.

Sustainable Building Centre

On the second floor of a building just east of Vancouver’s Granville Island Market is the new Sustainable Building Centre, a joint initiative of SFU’s Centre for Sustainable Community Development and Ecotrust Canada. “It’s a walk-in one-stop shop for all things related to ‘green’ construction,” explains Dr. Roseland. “You can see samples of materials such as carpeting made without toxic chemicals, and get information on architects, contractors and renovators who specialize in sustainable techniques and materials.”

The Centre is open Thursdays and Fridays from 10 AM to 5 PM and Saturdays from noon to 5 PM. Developed with the support of Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD), the Centre has attracted additional funding from VanCity Credit Union and other supporters.

For more information, visit the Centre at www.sustainablebuildingcentre.com.
As we conclude our 40th Anniversary year, we have many reasons to be proud of the extent to which SFU has grown and matured. When the University opened in 1965/66, enrollment was just over 2,600 students, and the first research agreement was signed when SFU joined the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria in the installation and operation of the TRIUMF nuclear research facility. In 2005/06, enrollment reached almost 27,800 students, of whom over 3,400 were in graduate programs. Our faculty complement has grown to over 800 individuals, and our research funding this year has reached a new peak of over $62 million. Today, SFU’s research agreements include those with the different health authorities, various government ministries, the hospitals, the BC Cancer Agency, and the Down Syndrome Research Foundation. We are indeed a very research-intensive comprehensive university.

Our research success depends on fuelling the research pipeline. It starts with recruitment and retention of outstanding faculty members, whose innovative research programs attract enthusiastic collaborators and significant funding. The pipeline grows with the addition of top students, many of whom are able to add more fuel by generating original ideas and attracting funding of their own. This has been a milestone year for research at SFU, as the total of $62 million is an increase of over 35% from the previous year in funding from external sources.

The dollars aren’t the whole story, though. In my last column I reported on some of SFU’s 2006 success rates that are well above the national averages for major programs of the three federal granting agencies. I am now delighted to add that SFU’s remarkable success rate of 90% for the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) Discovery Grants competition is the highest of any university in the country. In the competition for Standard Research Grants awarded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), SFU’s success rate of 50% is the highest of the major universities in BC and, of institutions that submitted more than 5 applications to SSHRC, SFU ranks 6th in Canada. This success augurs well for the calibre of the faculty complement.

The output at the end of the pipeline is our level of scholarly activity and productivity, which is growing apace. A recent study by Re$earch Infosource Inc. named SFU the top comprehensive university in Canada for publication effectiveness, a measure of the quality and impact of research at each university (11 were included in the “comprehensive” category) relative to its cost. These results show that our faculty members have the intellectual horsepower to deliver a bigger bang for the research buck.

For more information, visit www.rvu.ca.

UNESCO designated GNWC as the official arts and culture site for the World Urban Forum. In this role, the campus hosted the World Urban Festival, which included the premiere of the Judith Marcuse Earth, a four-year international arts initiative exploring issues of global sustainability and social justice through the eyes of young people.

For more information on the World Urban Festival, visit www.worldurbanfestival.com.
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COMMUNITY TRUST ENDOWMENT FUND

COMPETITION 1: UPDATE

The SFU Community Trust Endowment Fund (CTEF) was established in 2005 to contribute to the University’s support of research, teaching and scholarship. Under the Terms of Reference approved by the Board of Governors last November, the first $3.5 million of income earned from the CTEF will be channelled into major initiatives under the five themes of SFU’s Strategic Research Plan (see www.sfu.ca/vpresearch/srp_final.pdf) with proposals invited every six months until January 2008, and thereafter on an annual basis. The first two projects recommended for funding under this initiative bring together interdisciplinary teams from across the University, as well as external collaborators.

ADVANCED MATERIALS AND NANOTECHNOLOGY FOR MEDICAL APPLICATIONS

A multidisciplinary team of eight SFU researchers will work together to take novel molecules and nanomaterials from the chemistry lab into clinical settings to develop new and innovative strategies for medical imaging, diagnostics, surgery and drug delivery. The research team includes internationally successful researchers in organic, inorganic, materials and bio-organic chemistry, molecular biology and biochemistry, kinesiology and computer sciences, working synergistically to create, apply and test novel approaches for the diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer and kidney stones as their first targets. The team also extends into SFU’s Faculty of Business Administration to capture an important source of expertise, and the work will be carried out under the guidance of experts in the fields of ethics, medicine and medical imaging to ensure a seamless and rapid application of breakthroughs to real-life problems. This initiative crosses several priority areas identified in SFU’s Strategic Research Plan, and was developed in response to the converging interests of the materials science, nanotechnology and medical communities to improve the quality of patient care and patient outcomes. The team leader is Dr. Neil Branda, SFU Professor of Chemistry, Canada Research Chair in Materials Science, and Acting Executive Director of 4D LABS.

EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND OUTCOMES IN DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

A team of 16 SFU researchers in economics, education, public policy, psychology and biological sciences will engage in projects to inform public debate and public policy on education, focusing on two interrelated research themes: (1) standards, assessment, accountability and organization; and (2) education and integration in diverse communities. The BC government has introduced important educational reforms in the school system, including increased use of standardized tests, greater school and program choice, and changes to class size and composition as well as to funding formulae and governance. This changing policy environment has produced ‘natural experiments’ that can provide valuable evidence related to the first theme. The education system plays a vital role in the social and economic integration of diverse population groups by providing important skills and knowledge and by shaping the spatial organization of communities. Research under the second theme will explore the school system’s integrative role in the context of the increasing diversity of BC’s population. Project researchers will develop and implement an innovative strategy for integrating community and stakeholder groups in the design, conduct, interpretation, application, evaluation and uptake of research under both themes. This project will bring thematic coherence to the work of a diverse group of researchers in areas that overlap with several priority areas of SFU’s Strategic Research Plan: public policy, economic organization, aboriginal learning, immigration, urban studies, and population health. It will build on well-established strengths in economics, psychology and education, integrate them with one another and with SFU’s new strength in public policy and emerging strength in dialogue, and will build bridges to SFU’s major new initiative in health sciences. The team leader is Dr. Jane Friesen, SFU Associate Professor of Economics.

COMPETITION 2: CALL FOR PROPOSALS

We are pleased to announce a call for proposals for the Community Trust Endowment Fund. Proposals must be submitted to vprsec@sfu.ca by Thursday, November 30, 2006.

Research teams must comprise at least five full-time tenured or tenure-track SFU faculty from at least two of the Priority Areas for Strategic Investment identified in SFU’s Strategic Research Plan. Research proposals must be built on a true partnership across disciplines and must emphasize a synthesis of research expertise in a well-integrated, high-quality, interdisciplinary program that extends beyond existing research themes. The proposal must incorporate the hiring of a new (external) faculty member into the research plan.

In order to facilitate the application process, we have provided an Application Form and CV Form. These forms can be downloaded from www.sfu.ca/vpresearch/CTEF/ctef_call.html, along with the Key Features of an Application and Application Guidelines, documents which provide important information to applicants.

If you have any questions about the application procedure, please direct them to Dr. Colin Jones, Director of the Major Projects Office and Assistant to the VP Research at cwjones@sfu.ca.

COMPETITION 1: SOCIAL EVENTS

SFU faculty members and administration are invited to attend a social event to learn more about the two projects recommended for funding from the first CTEF competition.

The dinner will be held on Thursday, November 2nd at the Diamond Alumni Centre. Details of this event are posted at www.sfu.ca/vpresearch. RSVPs to lhinton@sfu.ca are required by Thursday, October 26th.
Identifying Consequences of Social Policy Changes

The election of the BC Liberal government in 2001 signaled major changes in provincial social and economic policy. Two years later, concerned that the government had no plans in place to evaluate the impacts that the changes were having, the BC office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) and SFU launched a five-year impact study. Called the Economic Security Project (ESP), it received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council through the Community-University Research Alliances program, along with cash and in-kind support from foundations, trade unions, advocacy groups and other organizations as well as SFU. Dr. Marjorie Griffin Cohen is the project’s principal investigator, and her community co-leader is CCPA’s BC Director Seth Klein. “We especially wanted to determine the effects on vulnerable populations— the elderly, youth, low-income people, the disabled, women and immigrants, for example,” Dr. Cohen explains. “So we focused on three main areas: employment standards, welfare and social policy reform, and community healthcare restructuring. Each major project is led by an academic and a community-based researcher. The project is also providing some 20 SFU graduate students in political science, women’s studies, public policy and geography with excellent on-site training and experience.”

Seth Klein, a former student of Dr. Cohen’s, is excited about the Centre’s involvement. “Normally,” he says, “we take academic research and analyze and popularize it. But now we’re actually doing the primary research, gathering information directly from focus groups and interviews with front-line workers, advocates and the people who rely on government services. In some policy areas we’ve come to know more about the impacts of change than the government itself does. It’s been a great partnership experience between academia and community groups.”

The project is now midway into its mandate, and has already produced some interesting findings. “The government had promised that thousands of new long-term care beds would be created,” Mr. Klein points out. “We discovered that this had failed to occur, and it became an issue during the 2005 election campaign. Another finding concerns young workers. There’s almost no protection for them, some of whom are just 12 to 14 years old. Our survey of young workers found that even the minimal regulations left in place are being routinely ignored.”

Dr. Cohen cites other revelations. “Many health-sector workers have gone from having decent hourly wages to close to minimum wage, due mainly to privatization of services. At the same time, employment standards are more complex than they were before. People don’t know what their rights are, and if they feel they are being exploited, all they get is a self-help kit with forms to fill out and present to their employer.

“The government has made it much more difficult for people to get welfare, disability payments, legal aid and other support by requiring applicants to fill out long questionnaires and by complicating the regulations around qualification. Meanwhile, funding for those who advocate on behalf of these people has been cut back or eliminated altogether.”

Is the government paying attention? “They get our reports and they see or hear summaries of them in the news media,” says Mr. Klein. “Are they listening? I guess this is where we have to distinguish between listening and hearing. They did seem to take our findings on child labour issues seriously, although that has yet to result in a meaningful reconsideration of their policy.”

The study’s next phase will focus on developing the kind of public policies that would balance prudent financial management with economic security for those in need. For more information on the project, visit www.sfu.ca/economicsecurityproject/.

Design Means Proposals for Change

There’s a new federally-funded Network of Centres of Excellence (NCE) on campus: the Canadian Design Research Network (CDRN). SFU has been involved in many of the NCEs since the inception of the program, currently leading the Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems (MITACS) NCE and previously heading the TeleLearning NCE in the 1990s, but this is the first to be based at SFU Surrey.

Rob Woodbury, professor in the School of Interactive Arts and Technology, is the Network’s Scientific Director. An architect by training, he views the
Who’s New

Last time Cecilia Kalaw was at SFU, she was earning her Master’s degree in Education and was doing freelance grant writing for non-profit community groups. She then spent the last six years doing health research and developing grant applications as a research coordinator at the University of British Columbia. There she directed research studies and coordinated communications and proposal development for the School of Nursing and NEXUS, a multidisciplinary health research unit. She’s now back at SFU as the Grants Facilitator for the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS).

“The prospect of rejoining SFU and contributing to a new faculty was attractive,” she says. “I was drawn to the FHS focus on interdisciplinary approaches to public health, global health and health policy. These present some of the most challenging issues facing Canada and the global community today.” As Grants Facilitator for FHS, she helps faculty members pursue and obtain research funding. She also monitors the ever-changing policies, funding trends and competition opportunities of Canadian and international granting agencies. And, of course, she ensures that faculty members comply with SFU’s own rules and regulations regarding funding applications and research management.

Cecilia Kalaw can be contacted at ckalaw@sfu.ca, 604-268-7037.

Few campus officials have as many daily appointments and meetings as the Vice-President, Research. It’s Lesley Hinton’s task to keep Vice-President B. Mario Pinto on time and in the right place.

Ms. Hinton graduated from Ontario’s Sheridan College in 2000 with a diploma in advertising, and from SFU in 2004 with a B.A. in Communications. She joined the SFU temporary staff pool in 2005 and was assigned to the Office of Research Ethics. She came to the Office of the Vice-President, Research earlier this year. She can be reached at lhinton@sfu.ca, 604-268-7355.

When Sacha Mann finishes her eight-month technology transfer placement at SFU’s University/Industry Liaison Office in December, she’ll join a venture capital firm. The SFU MBA graduate with a background in chemistry is a WestLink Technology Commercialization Intern.

The Calgary-based WestLink Innovation Network (www.westlink.ca), to which SFU belongs, supports the acceleration of technology commercialization in Western Canada. Its internship program develops managers knowledgeable in technology management, commercialization in a high-tech company and venture capital/finance.

Ms. Mann has gained management and corporate finance experience by working with small, medium and multinational companies in Europe and North America, and managing projects in Australia and Asia. Through the WestLink program, she gained further experience in business development with a local biotechnology firm, conducting due diligence on licensing opportunities and market research. Working with SFU Technology Managers Ziba Afshar and Don Osman, she is involved in technology valuation and patent management, licensing negotiations and new company formation for life science and medical device technologies.

Network as the latest step for Canadian designers and engineers, some of whom have known and worked with each other for over 15 years. They represent every design school in Canada, and include specialists in architecture, interactive technology, graphic design, film-making, computer science and engineering.

“Why is design so important?” he asks rhetorically. “Probably the key reason is globalization, which has made almost everything a commodity. The route to advantage in such a world is through the creative things a society does. Design is one of these. Look at how their design expertise has benefited the Scandinavian countries — Finland, in particular — and Italy. Not surprisingly, Asian countries such as Singapore and Korea have realized this. Canada, like any developed nation, must innovate to thrive.”

“We’ve adopted the widest possible definition of design: the process of making proposals for change. If you’re doing research aimed at ‘making proposals for change’ you can find common cause with many other people, whether you’re advocating a change in learning, computer design or architecture, to name three possibilities.”

The Network will focus on six research themes, providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and ensuring that design expertise remains in Canada. The six themes are: Advanced Design Technologies, Fabrication, Interactive Technologies, Design Visualization and Simulation, Visual Analytics, and Sustainability.

Sustainability in design aims to maximize positive design performance and minimize deleterious environmental effects. The Canadian Design Research Network already has three centres of sustainability, one of which is the new Centre for Interactive Research on Sustainability being developed at the Great Northern Way Campus in Vancouver.

“The federal government’s NCE New Initiatives program provides us with $400,000 a year for two years and it can be renewed for two years,” Dr. Woodbury points out. “We’ll use most of that to stage design workshops through which we can meet the requirements of NCE funding, such as setting up internships, facilitating technology transfer and creating a cadre of people skilled in all forms of design. We’re counting on the NCE investment to leverage several times that amount from other sources.”

Dr. Woodbury, who has conducted research at universities in Canada, the USA and Australia and came to SFU in 2001, praises the climate for initiative that SFU has created. “It’s the most flexible university in which I’ve worked,” he says, “and it’s the best university in which to start something new.” For more information, visit www.cdm.ca and www.siat.sfu.ca.