Semester In Program

We are excited about Semester In, a new pathway facilitating SFU Departments and Faculties to incorporate semester-long, cohort-based learning approaches into their curriculum, similar to the Semester in Dialogue. Faculty would develop their own courses as part of their Department/Faculty academic offerings, with the support and mentorship of Semester in Dialogue faculty and staff.

Semester In consists of three new five-credit courses, DIAL 393W, DIAL 394, DIAL 395, that can be used to pilot semester-long, full-time, cohort-based learning models. While the course numbers are housed with our Dialogue program, Departments/Faculties can use these numbers to build their own models adhering to an underlying set of Principles held in common with the Semester In Dialogue.

Our hope is that Semester In will stimulate a wide range of approaches enriching the overall learning environment at SFU. For example, many Departments/Faculties have been discussing the advantages of creating capstone learning opportunities, and Semester In would be an ideal fit for that objective.

For further information, contact: Semester@sfu.ca

Principles for Semester In and Semester in Dialogue

- **Dialogue**: Practice and harness the power of dialogue to facilitate shared inquiry by demonstrating active listening, asking critical questions, and embracing the challenges of thinking together.

- **Experiential Learning**: Learn from your experiences by immersion in complex real-world situations, implementing ideas you care about and critically reflecting on the process as a whole.

- **Impact**: Make a positive impact with/within the community by developing a nuanced understanding of public issues and the skills to foster mutually beneficial partnerships that are grounded in the qualities of reciprocity, mutual respect, shared authority and co-creation of goals and outcomes.

- **Relationships**: Building relationships is central to doing meaningful work in the Semester; initiate and nurture relationships based on mutual respect between students, instructors and community partners.

- **Communication**: Develop core communication and organizational skills; find your ‘voice’ and grow professionally.

- **Content Knowledge**: Bridge the knowledge gap between your personal interest and the semester topic by bringing passion, curiosity and developing a rich understanding of the course material.

- **Self-Reflection**: Grow in your knowledge of yourself through your experiences, opportunities and self-reflection.

Specific course outlines for each Semester In would be co-developed with feedback from the Semester in Dialogue, guided by these principles.
History and Background

The Semester In concept emerged from one of SFU’s signature programs, the Semester in Dialogue, a one-semester, full-time offering designed to inspire students with a sense of civic responsibility and encourage their passion for improving society. The Semester in Dialogue is unique in being the only undergraduate program at SFU outside of our traditional department and faculty administrative structure, an unusual position for any university teaching program.

The Dialogue Semester began in 2002 as a means to encourage student learning, inspired by the opening of the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, putting undergraduate students at the center of this initiative. The intention was to expand the boundaries of traditional education by creating deeper experiential learning, community engagement and dialogue opportunities, thereby providing students with the inspiration and tools necessary to become active citizens. The Semester is thriving 18 years later, having completed more than 45 unique semester offerings to almost a thousand students.

The Semester in Dialogue is a rigorous, intensive program, and students have a workload similar to that of a typical full-time semester. The semester is open to students from all departments and disciplines who have completed 45 credit hours. Twenty students from diverse areas of study are selected for each program. Our recruitment process seeks disciplinary and experiential breadth, with admission criteria emphasizing motivation, community engagement, and accomplishments in addition to academic achievement. A typical semester will have students that represent 10 to 15 departments. A recent program, for instance, included students from archaeology, anthropology, biology, communications, economics, English, history, kinesiology, molecular biology, psychology, sociology, and women’s studies.

The Semester is a full course load (15 credits fall and spring, 10-credits in a full-time but shorter summer offering) and is presented as one seamless unit, but for grading purposes credits are divided into three simultaneous courses: DIAL 390 (Dialogue), 391 (Seminar), and 392 (Final Project). Students participate in the program Monday through Friday during normal working hours, either for formal class time or to work collaboratively with their peers and community partners. They spend time outside of formal class hours on reading, research, projects and writing.

Organizing a Semester In: Practical Matters

Courses/Prerequisites/Requirements

Semester In is presented as one seamless unit, but for grading purposes credits are divided into two or three simultaneous courses offered as a full 15 credit version with all three courses, or a shorter 10 credit version, DIAL 393W and DIAL 394.

Credits for the three courses are applied towards Departmental/Faculty major or minor requirements, but could also be used for breadth requirements for students outside the offering Department or Faculty. Departments/Faculties might also decide to approve their Semester In as meeting requirements towards an Honours degree.
Generally, two or three faculty teach full-time each semester, the equivalent of 7.5 credits or roughly two typical SFU courses per faculty for the 15 credit model. Faculty may be seconded from SFU departments through teaching buyouts, or come from the community and be paid a stipend.

**Semester In (Dialogue Component)** DIAL 393W (5): The Dialogue component of the Semester In will immerse students in the art and practice of thinking and communicating. The focus will be on strategies and methods to use in understanding diverse perspectives. Students will have an opportunity to expand their verbal and written communication skills as well as explore dialogue through invited guests and internal discussions. Prerequisite: 45 units or permission of instructor. Must be taken simultaneously with DIAL 394.

**Semester In (Seminar Component)** DIAL 394 (5): Topics covered each term will vary, but generally each course will examine a subject that encourages broad approaches and probes provocative issues. Learning will be active rather than passive, stimulating students to research, explore and discuss. Prerequisite: 45 units or permission of instructor. Must be taken simultaneously with DIAL 393W.

**Semester In (Final Project Component)** DIAL 395 (5): Students will develop a class-wide final project, including conception, design, implementation and a final report. As well, each student will present a final individual project, to be designed with faculty. Prerequisite: 45 units or permission of instructor. Must be taken simultaneously with DIAL 393W and DIAL 394.

Restrictions: Departments/Faculties would decide whether their Semester In would be open to students across the university, or limited to students enrolled in the offering Department or Faculty.

Students can only enroll in one Semester In or Semester in Dialogue program.

Semester In would not be eligible for credit towards a Dialogue Minor, unless pre-approved by the School of Communications, which offers the Dialogue Minor.

A Semester In would normally be offered no more than twice under DIAL numbers. We would expect Departments/Faculties to apply to Senate to create their own course numbers at that point.

Enrollment should be capped at 20 students.

**Role of Semester in Dialogue**

Departments/Faculties interested in utilizing the Semester In course numbers should contact the Semester in Dialogue at semester@sfu.ca. We provide advice and feedback to faculty in developing their course outline and during their Semester In. Faculty designated to teach in an upcoming Semester In would be encouraged to sit in on several Semester in Dialogue classes to become more familiar with this type of instruction.

In addition, we have an expanding group of current and former Semester in Dialogue and Semester In faculty who meet regularly as a community of practice to learn from each other’s experiences. Potential Semester In faculty would be encouraged to join this community of practice.

We also have considerable logistical experience in the nuts and bolts of offering semester-long, full-time, cohort-based courses, including advising on the application/admissions process, advertising and promotion through social media platforms, SFU internal communications, physical mail outs, posters and our alumni.
newsletter, registration issues, putting on student-organized events, and many other aspects of offering these courses. Our faculty and staff would be available to provide support for these areas and coordination of promotional materials, as well as for the pedagogical components.

**Role of Departments/Faculties**

Although the course numbers have DIAL designations, the offering Department or Faculty would be responsible for all academic aspects of their *Semester In*, including:

- Deciding on theme/topic/focus for their *Semester In*
- Choosing faculty to teach
- Developing course outline
- Scheduling and room reservations
- Advertising and promotion (we would also link through our advertising/promotion)
- Using the *Semester In* logo on all public promotions and formal communications
- All resources and other aspects involved in offering the course
- Grading (grades would be approved by the Department Chair and Faculty Dean)
- Any disputed grades, or other grievances, would be adjudicated through normal Department/Faculty channels

**Funding and Resources**

Departments/Faculties would provide funding, as they already do for their courses. The principal expense is for faculty teaching time, which could involve temporary or long-term reassignments, teaching buyouts, and/or community members receiving stipends. A *Semester In* would also benefit from classroom space dedicated full-time for the Semester, with appropriate work space for students, and accessible faculty offices nearby. Particular semesters might require other space, for example laboratory space for a science-focused program.