

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM SM 5/2/68 Paper S-986

John Matthews

Chairman of Senate

To: Copy to the Registrar, to Dr. Cunningham,
to Dr. Battison

Subject: Upper level enrolment--Spring 1968

From: John Matthews, Dean

Faculty of Arts

Date: January 17, 1968

1. General

Simon Fraser University was opened with the intention of attaining standards of academic excellence. With this intention the policy was laid down of lectures coupled with 'tutorials', set at a norm of fifteen students. Faculty were engaged to this end.

Because of financial constraint primarily and space constraint secondarily, faculty strength in all departments has been limited. In both the History Department and the PSA Department and possibly in others, certain upper level courses can only be given adequately by one member of faculty. He has to take the lectures and all tutorials. If an extra tutorial is added, he must accept an excessive teaching load unless he can be relieved of some other work such as a lower level course commitment. If the rest of the department is, as was supposed to be ensured by the budgetary constraints, carrying a full load, there is no one to whom the additional work can be given. It is true that additional teaching assistants can be negotiated for but this will not answer the particular problem.

Any other solution--expansion of tutorial size or use of teaching assistants in these upper level courses--entails a reduction in the standards aimed at for the University. Furthermore any interference with departmental decisions as to how academic excellence is to be achieved is not only presumptuous but infringes upon the department's right of judgement in its own discipline. It also throws doubt on the competence of the Head. Overloading of faculty will cause further discontent and faculty members will be looking for positions elsewhere.

It is for Senate to decide whether this is indeed to be the University's policy in the face of present constraints. The alternative is to admit the necessity for restraining students from entry into certain upper level courses in a particular semester.

2. Report on Current Enrolment In Upper Level Courses

The PSA Department allowed pre-registration for its own Honors students, for whom these courses were essential, while keeping a few places open for students from other departments. The History Department restricted entry beyond thirty in four 400-level courses until all four reached this point. Policy in the History Department is not to allow their own students to limit their study of History to a narrow field. Students from other departments who wished to take one of these courses were directed, where it seemed reasonable, into one which had not reached this limit of thirty.

I am informed that in neither of these departments was any student turned away absolutely. If the course he asked for was full, he was either persuaded to take another course or it was agreed that he should have

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priority in the next semester. While it cannot be claimed that all students so re-directed were satisfied, it appears that they recognized the difficulties which departments are contending with at the present time and have accepted the situation. No student has come to me with any complaint.

Current enrolment in upper level courses in History were in fact allowed to go up to 32 and 34 in two courses. Others did not reach the 30 limit.

There is concern in the PSA department over the problem of meeting, with the present faculty establishment, the upper level commitments in the Fall of 1968, because of both the number of students listed as awaiting opportunity to take these courses, and also the department's own major and honors students coming through. The Department is investigating this problem.

Student senators are making their own inquiries. I have heard through them that many students are reluctant to lodge complaints either to a department head or to myself, for fear of retaliation. Members of faculty, in the student's view, hold his fate in their hands. Groundless as such fears may be, they may account for the absence of complaints. I have had no final information at this date as to the results of these inquiries.

John Matthews

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

Paper S-98(b)

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Adm. mem.

To Registrar, Senate

From Allan Cunningham,

Head, Department of History

Subject Enrolment in 400-level courses

Date January 12th, 1968

14733-PC

Dear Registrar,

In your capacity as secretary of Senate, would you lay the appropriate number of copies of this paper before that body.

Registration is with us again, not for the first time without a Registrar. At such times, students frequently complain that they receive a substantial amount of mis-counselling from members of faculty. As departmental practices appear to be diverging at an accelerating rate, the amount of mis-counselling which takes place at each registration period can be expected to increase accordingly, unless the different practices of individual departments are candidly acknowledged in the University calendar. Obviously, where these practices are at variance with overall University interest, they should cease. When they represent no more than a reasonable, practical interpretation of the University calendar, they should be described with some care in that calendar.

The purpose of this paper is to invite Senate to recommend to departments an optimum enrolment figure for their upper level courses, an issue upon which the University might reasonably hope to exact some uniformity of practice at least for sometime to come. While the present invitation comes to Senate only from the undersigned department, Senate has the power to take up this subject if it so chooses, and I believe the subject has become of paramount importance to us all. Very simply, the History Department believes an optimum figure for 400-level courses to be thirty students (assuming the Professor has other teaching commitments also), but some departments deny the need for any ceilings whatever.

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Most Faculty will agree that enrolment in an upper level course should be virtually unrestricted if such a course were based, as most lower level courses are, on large formal lectures with Teaching Assistants to help with the associated tutorial groups. However, the Teaching Assistant has no place in 400-level work where Faculty should teach students exclusively, ideally in small groups in which the teaching and tutoring functions are often merged. The Department of History believes that such a course, since it carries five credits for the successful student, ought to require four contact hours per week between the students and the Professor. Thus, Professor X would spend six hours per week with this upper level class. The balance of his teaching responsibilities could consist of a lower level course, requiring two hours of lectures from him, or the addition of a further fifteen students to the said upper level course, which would likewise add two hours to his original teaching commitment of six hours. And so the only reason for raising the enrolment of Professor X's upper level course to forty five students is in the event that Professor X has no other teaching commitments.

Only this week however, the Dean of Arts has informed me that the History Department has come under some criticism from other departments in the Faculty of Arts, because it has sought to limit their course enrolment to thirty students in each. Our critics apparently claim that when students are denied admission to the upper level history courses on the grounds that the said courses have reached their thirty member ceiling, that other departments have to carry the extra burden of student numbers.

I would challenge this criticism on four counts. Firstly, any department which grumbles at the additional burden of students thrown upon it when a neighbouring department closes off its courses, is in effect admitting that there should be a ceiling set to course membership after all; otherwise, there would be no need for grumbling. Secondly, other departments practise enrolment limitation in other ways; for instance, one Arts Department operates a pre-registration system of its own and this too is a restrictive system. Thirdly, so long as the Department is teaching the overall number of upper level students which it has contracted to teach, and for which it has received budgetary provision, it hardly seems reasonable for its enrolments in upper level courses to be determined by pressures from students or other departments, since the department alone can say with precision how the total number of students accepted at the upper level should be

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dispersed through the upper level courses offered.

Fourthly, and much the most important point, the departments are only staffed and equipped to teach so many students. Each year, the departmental budget proposals are scrutinised in their preliminary stage by the President, who uses independent forecast, of probable departmental enrolment which are prepared for him by the Director of University Affairs. Relying upon these latter forecasts as well as upon other criteria, we are all used to that process by which the President pares down new Faculty requirements and trims away operating money to an absolute minimum - a minimum which many of us, who care for academic standards, often feel comes well below an acceptable minimum. It therefore seems to me extremely odd that when registration periods come along, departments which have had budget cuts imposed upon them should carp at one another for not accepting their enrolment. Our budgets are regulated to permit us to teach only so many students: so long as we are teaching the numbers of students at both the lower and the upper levels which we are equipped to teach efficiently, why should we pretend that we can teach more when registration time comes? Logically, departments which claim to be in a position to accept students in unlimited enrolments at the upper level must somehow have escaped the President's axe, for the implication of their policy is that they have money and Faculty in reserve.

The real question here is one of standards, in which the departments are anything but uniform. We can teach any number of students at Simon Fraser University if we are ready to lower standards indefinitely, and one of the most distressing features of our publicity as an institution is the minimal prominence given to this question. Fortunately, it is Senate's prerogative to speak out on standards, and I hope it will agree:

- a) That ceilings on courses be legitimate.
- b) That no department shall be coerced into accepting excessive numbers into its upper level courses, if it is already able to meet the President's Teaching Cost Index criterion.
- c) That thirty is a reasonable membership for an upper level course for a Professor teaching a lower level course also, while forty-five is a reasonable membership for an upper level course for a Professor who is teaching no other course at that time.