

S.74-55

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

To SENATE

From SENATE COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC
PHILOSOPHIES AND ACADEMIC OBJECTIVES

Subject DRAFT REPORT - SENATE COMMITTEE ON
ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHIES AND ACADEMIC
OBJECTIVES

Date APRIL 18, 1974

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

PRESIDENT'S OFFICE
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

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To.....	K. Strand	From.....	Senate Committee on Academic
	President		Philosophies and Academic Objectives
Subject.....	Report of the Senate Committee on Academic Philosophies & Academic Objectives	Date.....	April 3, 1974

Attached is the report of the Senate Committee to Examine and Discuss Academic Philosophies and Academic Objectives for Simon Fraser University.

The charge to the Committee was as follows:

To hold hearings, examine and discuss academic philosophies and academic objectives for Simon Fraser University.

To present a report to Senate for its consideration at the May 1974 meeting.

In fulfilling its charge, the members of the Committee have reviewed and discussed alternative academic philosophies and academic objectives for Simon Fraser University. In addition, we have solicited comments from members of the University community.

That portion of the charge relating to the holding of hearings has been not fulfilled. In its initial deliberations, the Committee members agreed that it would be preferable to hold hearings on the basis of a document to which reactions could be sought. Thus, the Committee's major efforts were directed to the preparation of a draft report.

Upon completion of the draft report, the timing was such that its publication and the holding of hearings would have occurred when students and faculty were preoccupied with final examinations. Furthermore, presentation of a report to the May meeting of Senate meant that it would have been impractical to try to incorporate into the report any substantive changes the Committee might have wished to make on the basis of the hearings.

The recommendations contained in the report, if adopted, will significantly affect the future direction of the University and all individuals associated with it. We believe that the reactions of the present University community to our proposals should be obtained. We are, therefore, suggesting that Senate receive our report at its May meetings; that the Committee subsequently hold hearings on the report and prepare a final report to Senate for consideration at a subsequent meeting.

J. Chase

ALTERNATIVE ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHIES AND ACADEMIC OBJECTIVES
FOR SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

At the February meeting of Senate, a committee comprising a student (Mr. R.F. Kissner), an administrator (Dr. W.A.S. Smith, Dean of Arts) and a faculty member (Dr. J. Walkley, Professor, Department of Chemistry), was established with the following charge:

"To hold hearings, examine and discuss academic philosophies and academic objectives for Simon Fraser University."

Dr. J. Chase served as secretary to the Committee.

The Committee's Recommendations

The Committee agreed that, within the present post secondary education system of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University should adopt philosophies and objectives by which it can offer its students a unique educational experience to complement, and so enhance, those educational opportunities already existing at the other provincial universities and community colleges.

In proposing a different educational experience, the Committee recognizes that this must not be a capricious act but must be such that the University's role (in improving the quality of life by the advancement of its intellectual content) is totally harmonious with the needs of this Province.

The Committee thus recommends:

1. That Simon Fraser University adopt the following statement as its principal academic goal:

"The education offered by Simon Fraser University shall prepare individuals to cope with the future in all aspects relevant to their existence."

2. That Simon Fraser University does not develop additional

professional schools but that within our own expertise and resources we recognize and offer certain professionally oriented courses and programs in areas not covered adequately elsewhere, and

3. That these professional programs and courses be placed at the post bachelor's degree level.

4. That Simon Fraser University move quickly and responsively to the offering of complete bachelor's degree programs in the Continuing Education Program.

5. That recognizing the potential of the community colleges (in providing courses up to the second-year Bachelor's degree level) Simon Fraser University construct its first two years of degree programs in a manner dissimilar in philosophy to that found at these colleges or other provincial universities.

6. That the overall nature of the university's undergraduate program be envisaged as a series of logical steps, involving sequentially the acquisition of a general background, training in a discipline, the application of the discipline to a number of relevant subjects, and the linking of disciplines via a focus on common problems.

The Committee's Rationale

The request to examine possible philosophies and objectives for this University comes at a time when all universities are confronted by persons within and without universities with the blunt demand that we identify our position in society. Values and problems must be examined because all universities are forced to make choices between competing demands. Simon Fraser University must identify its own unique features and decide how to use them to determine its own road of integrity and quality. The university which pretends to be all things to all people is on the road to mediocrity.

Society faces a future of increased complexity and needs to make the maximum use of all its resources to surmount present ills and to plan, and achieve, an acceptable future for all. Within almost a decade the universities have moved from a position in society in which their role appeared self-obvious to one in which their costly existence can be made by some to appear almost superfluous. The general acceptance of universities as a natural part of our educational system and the move from high school to university (where education usually ends) as an almost unquestioned step has changed. Education is seen today to be continuous throughout life and not limited to the early years. Also being questioned is the need to link the education of the post-secondary student to a campus community lifestyle.

If we cannot say what we can do for society and if we cannot determine how we can relate in a meaningful way to society, our very future will be threatened. We might be required to perform functions that emerge from the immediate concerns of society. The threat is not that we could not satisfy these demands but that in so doing we would no longer be a university.

In developing philosophies and goals appropriate to this University, delineating parameters arising from our location, from provincial requirements and from national demands must be recognized. An examination of these, with an understanding of ourselves as we now are (i.e. with present potential and limitations), is found to lead to a relatively small set of academic alternatives.

What are we now? We are a university of high academic standing. Like other universities, we have programs of high excellence and those of less excellence. We have areas of expertise concerned primarily with local matters, some with national themes and others involved mainly in the international concerns of universities. Over the past nine years, we have collectively established a university of high national reputation. We have

provided hundreds of students with a thoroughly reliable academic background. We have both in an architectural and environmental sense one of the more beautiful of university campuses. We are, comparatively, far more innovative and experimental in our teaching methods than most Canadian universities. Like most Canadian universities, however, we continue to offer to our students a traditional and conservative educational program.

We have done well and have done so without a "grand plan", with goals set more by departmental dictate than as perceived as fitting into some integrated whole. Our philosophies are individually conceived and represent in their diversity the diversity of the educational backgrounds of the faculty. Why now move to constrain the educational experience we offer our students to some common philosophic theme? Why set goals that embrace the whole university rather than continue to develop the goals of departments? The answer lies in the need for the University, at this particular time, to decide if it wishes to continue to offer those things typical of all Canadian universities or wishes to plan to offer something different.

If the former, then our philosophies must remain ill defined boundless "nothing-sayings" and our goals no more than "to be what we are". This being so, the experience of past years suggests that we shall continue to offer a highly traditional educational experience; that course content and course structure will continue to represent departmental interests and will continue to be oriented to graduate school preparation. To the local community, our role will largely be one of manpower training. If the latter - if we do wish to plan to offer something different - we [the University community] must embrace common philosophies and objectives that will establish the directions in which we wish to go.

We may generalize at this point and suggest that the essential role of a university lies in the advancement of knowledge and the attainment of an increased understanding of man and society. This is a historical

role and yet one which is more valid today than ever.

There is, in fact, no other large sized multi-disciplinary collection of persons of high intellectual ability assembled in a single institution to play this role for society.

A second task for a university is to produce an environment conducive to the personal development of its students, to their overall cultural development and to their obtaining skills necessary for them to be contributing members of society.

In a university these two roles should be interrelated and complementary. The philosophies and objectives of Simon Fraser University should ensure this.

What was demanded of universities during the '50's and the '60's, they could do well and be seen to be doing it. The social commitment to educating an ever-increasing number of young people combined with the specialized training demanded by society justified an ever-increasing public financial commitment to the universities. This large infusion of public funds led to an unprecedented proliferation of new specialties and sub-specialties in most disciplines, and an enormous expansion in knowledge, particularly technical/scientific knowledge.

In more recent years, even before the present lack of employment opportunities, many recognized that the over-emphasized professional training of students was totally detrimental to both their personal and cultural development. We can further see that in the imbalanced expansion of knowledge, actively encouraged by the universities, the universities themselves failed society. The imbalance of the increase in technical knowledge over man's understanding of man and his society has left a desperate legacy for man's future. The total overview of man's future, which is surely the charge of the universities, was not there.

The dream of Western society of a future in which life will be a

matter of relatively indolent leisure crammed with material luxuries is with us yet. This dream, dominant in our concept of the future, was founded largely upon the tremendous technological progress of the late '50s and throughout the '60s. The '70s have seen technology not only reduced to impotence by seeming barbarity but even, in itself, create a real threat to the very survival of the whole of mankind. Rather than abandon its dream, Western society has chosen to regard its present problems not as signposts which must serve in the design of the future, but as something serving to delay the onset of the age of leisure.

It is from within this latter framework that society now demands relevance of its educational institutions. It requires its educational institutions to cure its present ills, presuming that once cured, the dream of leisure, of plenty, will become a reality.

Without doubt, tomorrow's world is not one of indolent leisure and of material luxuries. To survive we shall have to use all the skills and creative ability that mankind can collectively assemble. Tomorrow's world will demand not only technological advances wildly beyond present conception but equally great advances in the understanding of man himself. It is doubtful if man can continue to change his environment to suit his demands and still retain an environment in which he can survive. To a greater degree, man will have to be concerned with his social and technical adaptation to a world of declining natural resources and an increasing demand by the population for equality or a "fair share" of these resources.

In the dismaying complexity of our unhappy society the all pervasive preoccupation with the "now" is an incredibly dangerous situation. While there are many "now" problems that demand attention, they can be ameliorated or perhaps cured within the extent of our present knowledge and need not be the (direct) concern of the universities. Other bodies, both of higher education and outside the educational framework, are capable

of supplying answers to these problems. It is with tomorrow's world that our universities should be concerned. The university is mankind's "brain" for future survival. We must allow our students to see possible futures, to appreciate the past and its role in forming today and to graduate from the university with creative, critical and enquiring minds.

A Philosophy for Simon Fraser University

The above arguments suggest an appropriate philosophy for this University. Our education role requires that our students achieve a high degree of personal and intellectual growth. Our research role requires that we pursue a fuller understanding of man and his physical and sociological environment and so achieve a better understanding of the future. These must be the primary concerns of the entire University and must be integrated into a whole in which the pursuit of excellence, the quest for meaningful change and the recognition of the intellectual needs of the individual exist as equal in merit.

Our first recommendation is:

1. that Simon Fraser University adopt the following statement as its principal academic goal:

"The education offered by Simon Fraser University shall prepare individuals to cope with the future in all aspects relevant to their existence."

To implement this goal, it is necessary to envision the characteristics which might reasonably be expected to enable an individual to cope with the future. We tentatively set forth the following list which, in our opinion, covers the sought-after characteristics of such an individual.

Individuals capable of coping with the future in all aspects of their existence will possess:

a) a personal centre of strength, resiliency and peace;

b) the intellectual skills to operate on data of any sort according to rational principles free from or at least aware of personal and local biases;

c) an intellectual flexibility permitting adaptation to innovation in all its aspects and ramifications;

d) a broad knowledge of the major aspects of their own and other cultures;

e) a personal system of ethics; and

f) a well-developed competence in an academic discipline.

Our Commitment to Professional Programs

Our second and third recommendations would then be:

2. That Simon Fraser University does not develop additional professional schools but that within our own expertise and resources we recognize and offer certain professionally oriented courses and programs in areas not covered adequately elsewhere, and

3. That these professional programs and courses be placed at the post bachelor's degree level.

Since the opening of Simon Fraser University in 1965, there have been dramatic changes in the post-secondary educational scene in British Columbia. The nine provincial regional colleges established in the last nine years have taken a substantially increasing proportion of those students proceeding direct from high school to some form of post-secondary education.

Second, it is now clearly evident as it may not have been in 1965, that the professional programs offered by the University of British Columbia, the technological programs of B.C.I.T. and the vocational programs of the

regional colleges adequately meet the needs of the province. To the extent to which they do not, we believe that the province would be much better served by expanding the existing programs at these institutions rather than developing similar programs at Simon Fraser University.

Our Commitment to the Community

We are also in a period where considerable changes are found both in the types of persons wanting a post-secondary education and in the type of education desired. Many more people are attending university. They are of many more levels of academic ability and of academic preparation than in earlier times, from many more cultural backgrounds, and with more diverse career goals. The present first year of university is often more productive for students with a better general background than that to which the universities articulated earlier. Many students with well defined academic or occupational goals find first year university work to have little relevance to these goals. Young people have also changed, they reach philosophical and social maturity earlier and yet are often kept for a longer period of time in a dependent status. Many of them would like more options to try alternatives as they select their occupations and their life styles and more chances to try out their productive/creative skills in real life situations. In their view, productive effort stands for independent status and a sense of personal worth. A formal education stands for dependency. Productive effort also stands for reality; formal education too often stands for an artificial environment.

The university today supplies only a small portion of lifetime knowledge and is, after all, only one of many sources of knowledge. Occupational habits have changed. Rather than long extended formal education in advance; more jobs require some basic skills and knowledge in advance and thus a willingness to keep on learning (with, of course, opportunities to learn).

Many occupations require, and will increasingly require, a periodic formal updating of knowledge. In addition, more people experiment with several occupations during their lifetime and need the opportunities to learn new skills. Again, more people want more variety in their lives and want continuing opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge.

All in all, we cannot continue to regard a university education as a rare and one time opportunity. The approach must not be as it once was "everything now and never again". This being so, we RECOMMEND:

4. That Simon Fraser University move quickly and responsively to the offering of complete bachelor's degree programs in the Continuing Education Program.

5. That recognizing the potential of the community colleges (in providing courses up to the second-year Bachelor's degree level) Simon Fraser University construct its first two years of degree programs in a manner dissimilar in philosophy to that found at these colleges or other provincial universities.

The Structure of the Undergraduate Curriculum at Simon Fraser University

In these last two recommendations we suggest that just as our trimester operation allows our students considerable flexibility in when they take courses, the evening degree program would also be providing greater flexibility in opportunity. We further suggest that rather than regarding the community colleges as competitive (i.e. offering the same students the same program) we should regard them as liberating us from having to offer the traditional first two years' degree program. We can then offer those students coming to Simon Fraser University a unique educational experience during these first two years of a type that can be offered only by our University.

We thus recommend:

6. That the overall nature of the University's undergraduate program be envisaged as a series of logical steps involving sequentially the acquisition of a general background, training in a discipline, the application of the discipline to a number of relevant subjects, and the linking of disciplines via a focus on common problems.

Our rationale for offering this recommendation for ordering the undergraduate curriculum can be briefly stated. We believe that one of the fundamental purposes of university undergraduate education must be to deal with the modes of conceptualization, the principles of explanation and the nature of verification. The emphasis in undergraduate education must be less on what one knows and more on how one knows what one knows. In our emphasis on method, one risks that sterile debate as to whether you can teach method apart from subject matter. The answer is obviously no. The shoe, however, is really on the other foot for can one teach a subject without an awareness of method? In this respect, the distinctions between conceptualization, discipline and subject matter should be made clear. A "concept" is a term that allows us to group together different phenomenon, or selected aspects of phenomena, under a common rubric. A "discipline" consists of a coherent group of interrelated concepts that can be applied to kindred phenomena and that allow one to make theoretical or explanatory statements about the relationship of these phenomena. A "subject matter" is a related class of phenomena that can be analyzed by a particular discipline.

All of this leads to our basic proposition as stated above, i.e. that this University's undergraduate education be envisioned as a series of logical steps proceeding from the general and historical to the linking of disciplines in dealing with common problems.

For the Future

There are many major topics that have been considered by this Committee but upon which, given our time constraints, no recommendation has been given. If the six recommendations are found acceptable, one of the first subsequent considerations must be the question of university "size". Questions concerning the size of Simon Fraser University may be viewed in two ways. First, we may like to consider that the University will continue to grow indefinitely with no constraints on its maximum size. Second, we may find it desirable to establish a maximum enrolment for the University and to undertake future planning in all of its areas with this constraint in mind. The original plans for the University envisaged a maximum enrolment of 18,000 students; but it would scarcely seem advisable to take this number on trust and to assume that the University will continue to expand until it has reached this or some undefined higher figure. Furthermore, the establishment of some maximum enrolment figure has implications for the admissions policies of the University. Has the University a special responsibility to accept students from the Lower Mainland even when their academic records are not competitive with those of applicants admitted from elsewhere? If the number of applicants in relation to places available increases, a policy of accepting students "off the top" will cause our actual admission standards to rise. Should this practice be changed? If so, on what basis?

The question of size has other implications as well. The historical legacy of Simon Fraser University contains a number of assumptions. Among them are the following:

1. that a major proportion of the university's enrolment should be at the undergraduate level.
2. that small classes in which students can maintain close contact with their instructors is a better method of instruction than large lecture classes

3. that the tutorial method is an effective method of teaching undergraduates.

4. that all undergraduate teaching should be done through the tutorial system.

These assumptions produce a heavy reliance on teaching assistants which in turn creates a demand for the development of graduate programs. The unavoidable conclusion is that the extent and size of the University's graduate programs is in large part determined by the growth of the undergraduate enrolment.

Our recommendations are based on the assumption that Simon Fraser should continue to be primarily an undergraduate university. We are, however, not committed to any of the other assumptions enumerated above and, in fact, recommend that each requires examination. Once having been examined and consonant decisions reached, it will then be possible to determine the extent of the graduate enrolment within the overall enrolment of the University.

Further, graduate programs at this University have taken one of two basic forms:

1. a continuation of undergraduate work (by far the prevalent mode) or

2. a provision for professionals to return from work to obtain further degrees in their areas of competence.

Again, we view this area as requiring examination with the objective of determining the direction of subsequent development of graduate programs.

The attainment of a vigorous undergraduate program in itself poses a number of related issues. Our recommendations are intended to provide all students during the first two undergraduate years with a "common core" education characterized by breadth and integration, i.e. courses of lateral interaction rather than the presently designed longitudinal modes.

The implications of such a curriculum on the trimester operation, the organization of faculties and departments and the transferability of students to Simon Fraser will need to be examined further.

The proposal to develop evening programs leading to a bachelor's degree challenges the existing division between the employment of faculty for the regular daytime program of the University and those employed by the Division of Continuing Education to teach courses offered during the evening, largely on an overload basis. The implications of moving to an extended university day, i.e. 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m., in which there is no differentiation between daytime and evening faculty should be considered.

We have recommended that the University free itself completely (with the exception of the Faculty of Education) from professional programs at the undergraduate level. Our expectation is, therefore, that the level of the undergraduate degree (at the end of four years) should be equivalent to the present majors level. Honors programs, which present a topic or discipline in depth and lead to graduate and professional schools, should be considered as part of a post first degree program. The continued necessity or desire of offering both a general and honors degree program at the undergraduate level should be examined.