

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

To: Senate

From: Senate Committee on
Undergraduate Studies

Subject: Revisions to the Bachelor of
General Studies Requirements

Date: October 6, 1986

Action undertaken by the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies at its meeting of September 30, 1986 gives rise to the following motion:

MOTION:

"That Senate approve and recommend approval to the Board of Governors, as set forth in S.86-56, the proposed

Revisions to the Bachelor of General Studies requirements."

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

SCUS 86-13

To..... ROSS SAUNDERS
CHAIRMAN, SCUS & SUAB

From..... EVAN ALDERSON
ACTING DEAN OF ARTS

Subject..... REVISIONS TO THE BACHELOR OF
GENERAL STUDIES REQUIREMENTS

Date..... SEPT. 23, 1986

The attached revisions to the Bachelor of General Studies have been approved by the Faculty of Arts Curriculum Committee, and the Faculty of Arts by referendum. Please place this item on the agenda of the next SCUS meeting. It is my understanding that this proposal should be considered by S.U.A.B. also. Would you co-ordinate the approval by both these committees.



Thank you.

cc M.C. Roberts
✓ R. Heath
N. Heath

EA/jds

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

TO: ALL FACULTY
FACULTY OF ARTS

FROM: R.C. BROWN
DEAN, FACULTY OF ARTS

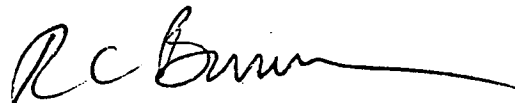
SUBJECT: REVISIONS TO THE
BGS REQUIREMENTS

DATE: SEPTEMBER 3, 1986

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As you may recall, the Faculty of Arts became the academic home of the Bachelor of General Studies degree last September. During this past year we have reviewed the requirements for this degree in order to ensure that the degree met the standards of the other degrees offered by the Faculty of Arts. The attached recommendations for changes grow out of this review process and have been approved by the Faculty of Arts Curriculum Committee. The degree serves a wide range of commendable academic functions, as it permits a level of flexibility not found in the Bachelor of Arts degree, while maintaining a high level of academic integrity. The changes proposed will enhance the quality of the degree, while still allowing maximum flexibility and they come to you with my fullest support.

RCB/mc



Revisions to the B.G.S. Degree

The attached proposal for revisions to the Bachelor of General Studies degree program follows from a review of the program that was initiated upon the transfer of the degree to the Faculty of Arts. The intention of the proposals is to retain the present spirit of the B.G.S. while correcting some problems in its administration. The degree regulations have proven quite difficult to administer both strictly and fairly, and seem to require some modification. Moreover, a few students appear to be using the degree in a way it was never intended, as a way of avoiding the GPA requirements for graduation within the Faculty of Arts.

This proposal has been delayed for some time pending consultation with the Faculty of Education, whose students have frequently chosen this degree option. Although the Faculty of Education is revising its program in ways that may make the B.G.S. less attractive to students seeking teaching certification, it now appears that they will not request changes to the structure of the B.G.S. as part of that revision.

An Overview of the BGS Degree and Its Students:

The B.G.S. degree, a non-specialized program for students who do not choose to complete a major, was established in 1971. The program provides students the opportunity to structure individual programs of study. It was also established in part as a response to those B.C. students outside the Lower Mainland of British Columbia who were not able to take courses at the Burnaby campus of SFU. The degree allows students to take an additional 30 hours of transfer credit, beyond the normal maximum of 60, from the universities in B.C. (UBC, OLI, and UVic). In 1984, 15% of the graduates availed themselves of this opportunity.

In recent years, the majority of those applying for the degree have been present or prospective B.C. school teachers, who comprised almost 70% of the graduates of 1984. These are better than average students, whose mean G.P.A. was 3.00 at time of graduation. Collectively, B.G.S. students take almost 50% of their courses from Education, the majority of which are at the 400 Division. They have a tendency to complete more Upper Division courses than the usual SFU Arts graduate. Very frequently the last 60 hours of course work, whether at SFU or at other institutions, are made up entirely of Upper Division courses. These students have required more of the advisor's time than the average student: their inaccessibility to campus, and the pressure for them to complete degrees to meet the standards of their profession, result in advisors having to communicate by letter and telephone

both with the student and the certification agencies of the province. With the coming revisions in the Faculty of Education, it is likely that this group of B.G.S. students will diminish in numbers substantially.

The remainder of the students have selected the B.G.S. degree for a variety of reasons. The degree appears to serve heterogeneous students needs. Some have an academic goal which requires diversity rather than departmental specialization, such as preparing for specific multidisciplinary graduate programs. These students tend to be highly selective in choosing courses to meet their particular goal. Frequently, they are excellent students, with a clear sense of direction that is not appropriately served by the more structured programs currently offered by this university. There are also on-campus B.G.S. students whose diverse course selection does not manifest any clear professional goal, but who plan a program around their own perceived needs and who perform quite acceptably.

There are also a number of B.G.S. students who are not training for teacher certification but who live out of town. The flexibility of the B.G.S. requirements creates a readier path to degree completion in the face of limited course availability through DISC or other means. There are also some students whose personal circumstances force them to move from the Vancouver area prior to completion of a degree, and who find the B.G.S. a satisfactory form of degree completion.

There is a small group of students who take the B.G.S. degree because they have failed to achieve high enough grades to complete a major degree. In 1984 there were 12 students whose GPAs were below 2.20, about 9% of the graduates. All of these students moved to the degree from a major program in their final or penultimate semester at SFU. Only 4 of the 12 have a GPA of over 2.00 in the Upper Division course work taken. Eleven of the twelve originally had a goal of BUS/ECON, but were unable to graduate with either degree. Apart from the possible overuse of the degree by education students, this is the only student constituency for the degree which it seems clearly desirable to minimize.

In summary, the majority of BGS students are highly motivated, better than average performers, who may not have access to the university campuses of Vancouver and Victoria. They show a strong tendency to take Education courses, and complete more senior courses than required. Although they take more courses at other institutions than the average SFU student, only a small percentage take more than number of transfer hours normally permitted. On the whole, the degree appears to meet a diversity of legitimate, if unusual, degree completion needs.

Revised Requirements for a B.G.S. Degree

PROPOSED CALENDAR ENTRY

The Bachelor of General Studies degree is a non-specialist degree program, administered within the Faculty of Arts. It is designed for students whose educational goals are not met by the other, more structured, undergraduate degree programs available in the university. Students may complete a minor or minors (but no major) in any academic area(s) as part of the B.G.S degree.

Requirements for the degree are:

120 semester hours of credit, including at least 45 upper division semester hour credits. The minimum requirement for graduation is a Graduation GPA of 2.0 AND a cumulative GPA of 2.0 in all upper division courses taken, except duplicate courses..

With the exception of EDUC 401-8, 402-7, 405-15 and 406-5, courses taken from any of the faculties may be used to satisfy the requirements for the degree, but students are cautioned that their admission to courses is subject to the prerequisite requirements of the various departments.

Students who may be considering this program are strongly urged to consult the program adviser before declaring the B.G.S. as their goal. The faculty adviser will work with the student to develop a program of courses to achieve the student's academic objectives. Students who declare a B.G.S. will be asked to maintain a program plan in the office of the adviser, and to consult regularly regarding course selection.

The B.G.S. program may not be used as a second or subsequent bachelor's degree, except by written approval of the Dean of Arts prior to admission. Students who hold a first degree and who are interested in a program of general studies may wish to consider an Extended Studies Diploma Program.

Transfer:

Special transfer regulations for the B.G.S. degree provide broadened opportunities for degree completion for students who may have difficulty in availing themselves of courses at Simon Fraser:

In accordance with normal university regulations, 60 hours of transfer and/or course challenge credit may count toward an SFU degree. In addition, a further 30 hours of transferable credit from a degree granting institution recognized and accepted by SFU may subsequently be credited toward the B.G.S. degree, provided that the student also completes at least 30 of the required 45 hours of upper division credit in Simon Fraser University courses.

Note that even within these special transfer regulations, students must complete a total of 45 hours of upper division credit. Any minor program undertaken within the B.G.S. must include at least seven hours of upper division credit earned at Simon Fraser. Please refer to the General Regulations governing Transfer credit.

MAJOR CHANGES AND RATIONALES

(Current Requirements appear on p. 67 of the 1986/87 Calendar)

1. Requirements: A 2.0 Cumulative Grade Point Average requirement in upper division work has been added.

Rationale: The current regulations are silent regarding GPA criteria for the degree, which means that only the general university regulations regarding graduation GPA apply. This has consequences for the academic standard of the degree. Because under the graduation GPA failed courses have no negative bearing on academic standing provided students have passed a sufficient number of hours, students with a cumulative GPA of considerably less than 2.0 can qualify for a degree. In itself this problem, if it is one, is a matter for the university as a whole and not just this degree program, but it has a further and deleterious consequence specific to the B.G.S. Because candidates for a B.A. degree within the Faculty of Arts are additionally required to achieve a cumulative GPA of 2.0 in their major subject, students who do not achieve this standing can sometimes use the B.G.S. as a fallback degree, one for which they qualify despite their demonstrated inability to complete a major program within the Faculty of Arts. Although such B.G.S. graduates do not form a large proportion of the total, it seems desirable to discourage this practice as a misappropriation of the degree's purposes and integrity. Although numerous remedies can be imagined, the most straightforward and simplest to administer appears to be the additional requirement of a 2.0 in upper division work.

This requirement has at least the following advantages: it places an emphasis on work presumably taken largely after a student has defined his or her academic goals, whether or not these are initially encompassed within a major program. It does not unduly burden an otherwise competent student with low grades attained early in that student's academic career. It makes the B.G.S. degree comparable to the Faculty of Arts degrees in that it requires the maintenance of a satisfactory GPA on a defined body of work undertaken, although in this case defined by level rather than by discipline. It will not unreasonably limit the choice of the B.G.S. as an academic goal at any point in a student's career, but at the same time it will make the degree less readily accessible to those who have singlemindedly but unsuccessfully pursued another degree goal. In relation to the liberal transfer regulations for the B.G.S., and particularly under their proposed revision here, it insures that the performance standard for the degree will be a Simon Fraser standard, based primarily on upper division work at this university.

An analysis of 1984 B.G.S. graduands at the lower end of the GPA scale reveals the kinds of differentiation among students this revision will cause. In 1984 12 students, 8.8% of the total, received a B.G.S. degree with a cumulative GPA of 2.2 or lower. All of these maintained an academic goal other than a B.G.S. until very late in their undergraduate careers. Under the new standard 4 of these marginal students would have graduated without further work and 8 would not. The average cumulative GPA of those who would have graduated was 2.12; their cumulative GPA in upper division work would have ranged from 2.04 to 2.34. Among those who would not have graduated under the new standard, the average cumulative GPA was substantially lower, 2.04, and their cumulative GPA in upper division work at the time they graduated ranged from 1.94 down to 1.74! Students with such a low level of performance in upper division work would not be barred from the possibility of receiving an SFU degree, but they would be required first to demonstrate their ability to handle upper division work at an average level that is a university-wide standard, either through the course duplication mechanism or work in other fields.

2. Program advice: Prior faculty approval of program is recommended but no longer stated as a requirement.

Rationale: It seems clearly desirable that students undertaking a B.G.S. should receive detailed academic advice from faculty. However, the regulations as currently stated are very difficult to apply uniformly to all students. Students who live at a distance from Vancouver or who declare a B.G.S. late in their undergraduate studies cannot be expected to pursue a

program of study planned around the B.G.S.; students who do plan in advance are, under the current regulations, inequitably required to seek approval for any significant deviation from the approved plan. It seems reasonable to state as requirements only those aspects of the program that are actually enforceable and enforced.

3. Restriction of use: Stipulation that the B.G.S may not be used as a second degree, except by prior permission of the Dean of Arts.

Rationale: One requirement of a second degree is that it must be in an area of study other than the specialization of the first degree. This requirement is difficult to correlate with the non-specialized nature of the B.G.S. Second degree programs are normally and properly used by students seeking to re-train or prepare themselves in a new field. For generalist students an appropriate alternative exists in the extended studies diploma program. The B.G.S. is only rarely used as a second degree, but most frequently by former education students who sometimes take nothing but education courses for the B.G.S., a practice that seems clearly to circumvent the spirit of the second degree regulations. On the other hand, it is not difficult to envision individual circumstances in which a prospective student might wish to undertake a coherent program of study demonstrably different from his or her first degree specialization and for which there is no existing major certification. Such students should have an opportunity to seek exceptional admission.

4. Transfer: Requirement of 30 upper division hours at SFU replaces the limitations of additional transfer credit to B.C. universities, but additional transfer hours must be obtained from degree granting institutions recognized and accepted by SFU.

Rationale: The current regulations attempt to maintain academic standards while liberalizing transfer arrangements by stipulating that the additional transfer credits must be obtained from UBC, UVic, or OLI, and that all 45 upper division hours must be taken from these or SFU. At the time these regulations were written it was envisioned that the B.G.S. might be a significant step toward a province-wide degree, toward which students might use a major component of Distance Education courses from any of the provincial sources. Whatever the earlier justification for these regulations, they now seem both cumbersome and outmoded. Students who rely on distance education are excluded from a wide range of available distance education courses from institutions such as Athabasca and Waterloo; a consortium degree now exists in B. C., even though it is apparently little used

at present; students who are obliged to leave this Province shortly before receiving a degree find the limitation of transfer credit to B.C. institutions quite arbitrary. In practice, these regulations are extremely difficult to administer, sometimes requiring complex recalculations when students change their goal to a B.G.S.

The proposed revision is intended to preserve the spirit of the degree while simplifying the regulations. It maintains the university wide minimum of upper division work at SFU, but without requiring that this must be completed within the last 60 hours. The revision also widens the range of institutions from which students can transfer the additional 30 hours, but does not permit courses from the B.C. colleges or their equivalents to count beyond the normally permitted 60 hours of transfer credit.