



Senate Graduate Studies Committee

Annual Report to Senate for 2000

Submitted by Dr. J. Driver, Dean of Graduate Studies
February 2001

Composition and Mandate of the Committee

There were a number of important changes to the Senate Graduate Studies Committee in calendar year 2000.

Following recommendations of the Graduate Student Survey Implementation Task Force (November 1998) the position of Dean of Graduate Studies was separated from the portfolio of the Vice-President, Research, and a full-time dean was appointed, effective 1st May. At the same time, the position of Associate Dean of Graduate Studies was eliminated.

Following recommendations from the Senate Review Committee, the SGSC was reduced in size, also effective 1st May. Previously SGSC had faculty representatives from every graduate programme, and graduate student representatives from each faculty, as well as representation from the Library and Registrar's office. As recommended by the Senate Review Committee, the representation of faculty members was changed to the chair of each faculty's graduate programme committee plus one other faculty member elected by and from each faculty's graduate programme committee. Graduate student representation was reduced to two students elected by Senate.

The SGSC reviewed its membership and terms of reference during the summer. The Committee recommended to Senate that the Graduate Issues Officer be added as an ex-officio member, and that the two graduate student representatives be elected by graduate students, rather than by Senate. These changes were passed by Senate. The terms of reference received minor rewriting, and these were also passed by Senate.

The current membership of SGSC is the Dean (chair), Registrar (or designate), Librarian (or designate), chairs of the five faculty graduate programme committees, one other faculty member from each of the five graduate programme committees, two graduate students, the Graduate Issues Officer of SFSS, and the Assistant Director Graduate Records (non-voting).

SGSC has established a regular monthly meeting schedule, in an attempt to spread the workload of the committee more evenly over the year. Currently meetings are held at 2.30 p.m. on the third Monday of each month. A list of meetings and activities for 2000 is attached as Appendix C.

Graduate Studies at Simon Fraser University

Masters programmes are offered in each faculty, doctoral programmes in all but Business Administration, and graduate diploma programmes in Business Administration and Education. In addition, the Dean of Graduate Studies office administers the Special Arrangements Programme, which provides a home for students with individual interdisciplinary programmes of study and research. Summary statistics on enrollments and award of degrees are available from Analytical Studies website and from the biannual Graduate Factbook. A list of programmes which permit part-time study is appended (see Appendix B).

Graduate enrollments increased steadily from the late 1980's to the mid-1990's, and have remained relatively stable since then (see Appendix A). This stability is the result of a number of factors. There were relatively few new graduate programmes approved in the late 1990's, and the number of faculty members available for graduate supervision has not increased significantly. Furthermore, funding levels for graduate students have increased slowly, while employment opportunities outside the university were relatively good. The number of degrees awarded has also increased steadily and reached a plateau in the late 1990's.

When compared with other provinces, British Columbia's universities award more graduate degrees per capita than all other provinces except Quebec, Nova Scotia and Ontario. This contrasts with the lower rate of undergraduate degrees. Approximately 15% of SFU's degrees are at the graduate level, making us comparable with universities such as Alberta, Manitoba, Victoria, Guelph, McMaster, York, New Brunswick and Waterloo. Locally, 21% of UBC's degrees are at the graduate level, and other universities with similar figures include Calgary, Carleton, Ottawa, Queens and Wilfrid Laurier (all at 19%), and Toronto (28%). (All data based on 1998 figures from AUCC website).

During the year 2000 the proposal for an MBA in Management of Technology was reviewed externally and recommended for approval by the Assessment Committee for New Graduate Programmes. This proposal will come to Senate in 2001. Currently, the programme is being offered under Cohort Special Arrangements.

The other major change in graduate programmes is the division of the Department of Mathematics and Statistics into separate departments during 2001. The graduate programmes will also be divided, thus adding to the total number of graduate programmes at SFU.

During the summer the Dean completed a survey of all departments to determine the extent to which they conform to standards proposed for the "ideal department" described in the report of the Graduate Student Survey Implementation Task Force. The results of the survey were collated and a report submitted to the Vice-President, Academic. A copy of this report is attached as Appendix D.

The 2000 edition of the *Graduate Studies Fact Book* has been produced, and will be circulated to all graduate programme chairs and placed on the Dean of Graduate Studies website. In previous reports of the Senate Graduate Studies Committee, the Dean has expressed concern about the rate of withdrawal of students from programmes, time to completion of degree, and disparity in

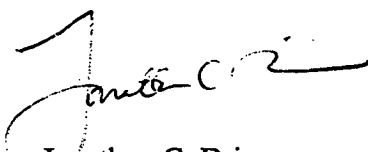
grading practices. The Fact Book demonstrates that these concerns remain valid, but these are widespread in North American universities.

Of greater concern to Simon Fraser University should be the problem of funding graduate students, especially in programmes where it is expected that most students will devote themselves full-time to study and research. Over the last decade the University has received increases to its base budget contingent on adding undergraduate spaces. We have not received any additional base budget funding for the overall increase in graduate enrollment. To some extent this has been offset by the increased success in faculty research grants, some portion of which will be used to fund graduate students. Nevertheless, SFU's 1997 survey of graduate students suggests that a significant number of students are inadequately funded. The recent (2000) report from the BC University Presidents' Council on students who graduated with masters and doctoral degrees in 1995 also shows that many graduate students must work or take out loans to pay for their studies.

Underfunding of graduate students is a problem across Canada, so universities which are able to increase their level of support are in a position to recruit the best students. At SFU the Special Graduate Entrance Scholarships programme is being continued in order to "top up" financial packages offered to the best students. We have also increased to \$35,000 the cap on total awards permitted to students receiving awards from non-private sources such as entrance scholarships, NSERC/SSHRC scholarships or SFU graduate fellowships.

SGSC Work for 2001

In addition to routine work, in 2001 Senate Graduate Studies Committee will review the Graduate General Regulations, and expects to bring any changes to Senate early in 2002. A review of the appeals mechanisms available to graduate students will be included in this process.

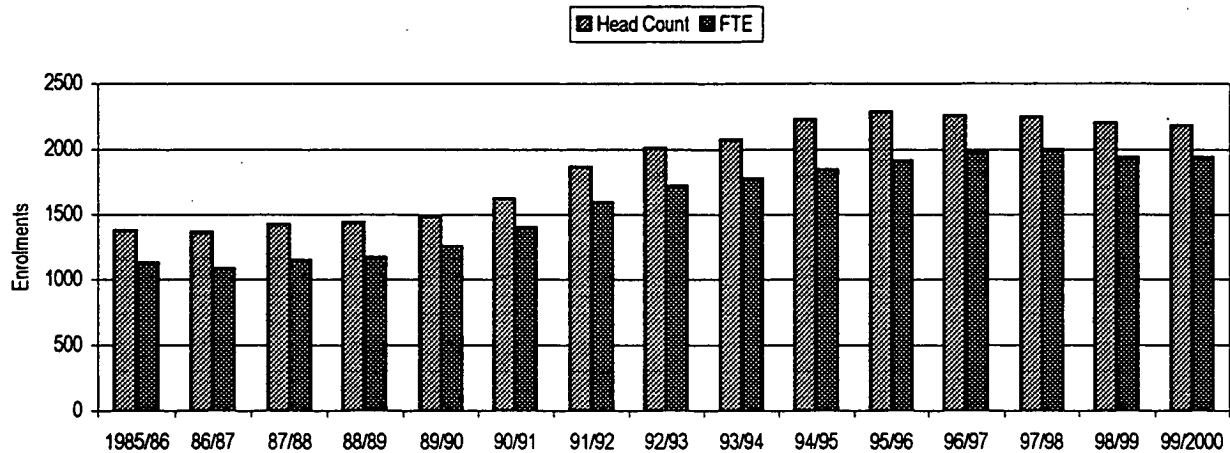


Jonathan C. Driver
Dean of Graduate Studies

Appendix A

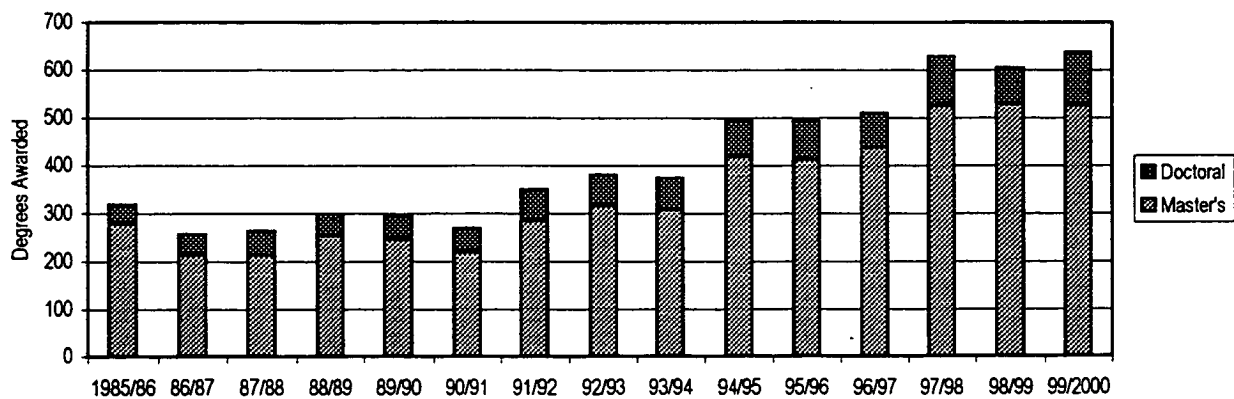
Annualized Graduate Enrolments for Fiscal Years

	1985/86	86/87	87/88	88/89	89/90	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Head Count	1377	1366	1426	1444	1486	1623	1864	2008	2071	2225	2282	2254	2246	2201	2180
FTE	1125	1084	1147	1169	1256	1404	1594	1720	1779	1844	1914	1972	1997	1938	1939



Degrees Awarded in Fiscal Years

	1985/86	86/87	87/88	88/89	89/90	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Master's	279	214	213	253	245	219	285	315	308	419	413	438	526	529	528
Doctoral	39	42	50	45	50	49	64	66	66	75	81	72	101	75	108



Appendix B

Programs approved for part-time study, as of December 2000:

Archaeology (M.A.,Ph.D.)
Biological Sciences (MPM)
Business Administration (Exec MBA)
Communication (M.A.,Ph.D.)
Economics (M.A.,PH.D.)
Education (M.A.,M.Sc.,M.Ed.)
Engineering Science (M.Eng.)
English (M.A.,Ph.D.)
French (M.A.)
Gerontology (M.A.)
History (M.A.,Ph.D.)
Liberal Studies (MAL)
Mathematics and Statistics (M.Sc.,Ph.D.)
Physics (M.Sc.,Ph.D.)
Political Science (M.A.)
Publishing (M.Pub.)
Resource and Environment Management (MRM)
Latin American Studies (M.A.)
Sociology and Anthropology (M.A.)
Special Arrangements (M.A.,Ph.D.)
Women's Studies (M.A.)

Appendix C

Report to Senate of the Activities of the Senate Graduate Studies Committee from January 2000 to December 2000.

1. Number of Meetings – 5
2. Graduate Curriculum Changes in Chemistry, Archaeology, English, Gerontology, History, Mathematics and Statistics, Business, Education, Earth Sciences, Economics, Criminology, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Publishing, Engineering Science, Kinesiology, MRM.
3. Three Recommendations for Admission under Special Arrangements. Two admitted and one withdrawn.
4. Restructure of the Senate Graduate Studies Committee.
5. Recommended to Senate that Graduate Students be represented on all sub-committees of the Senate Graduate Studies Committee.
6. Recommended to Senate that Graduate Students representatives and alternates be elected to the Senate Graduate Studies Committee by Graduate Students.
7. Recommended to Senate that the Graduate Issues Officer be an ex-officio member of the Senate Graduate Studies Committee.
8. Agreed to review the Graduate Student Appeals Committee in the light of the terms of reference so that there is fairness for all concerned.
9. Agreed to review the Graduate Studies-General Regulations.
10. Agreed to schedule regular meetings of the Senate Graduate Studies Committee every third Monday of the month.

The Ideal Department Survey

Jon Driver
Dean of Graduate Studies
Simon Fraser University
September 2000

Report to the Vice-President, Academic

SUMMARY

A survey of all units offering graduate programmes was undertaken, in order to determine how closely they met the expectations of a hypothetical "ideal department." The responses suggest that units perform well in many areas. More attention could be paid to recruitment, notably in attracting top students and in matching programme size to resources. The level of funding of graduate students remains a concern, and it is recommended that faculty be encouraged to apply for more research grants which include provision for graduate student support. The role of graduate students in unit governance requires further investigation and discussion.

Introduction

In 1997 Dr. Bruce Clayman initiated a survey of all graduate students at SFU. The survey was performed by an ad hoc committee, chaired by Dr. Ellen Gee, which subsequently produced a detailed report and recommendations in March 1998. (See the Dean of Graduate Studies website for details).

Dr. Clayman then formed a task force to develop a set of prioritized recommendations. One of these was that academic units work towards a model of an "ideal department." The task force described such a department, including topics such as recruitment, supervision, communication and governance. The task force also recommended that a report be submitted to the Vice-President, Academic, outlining steps which had been taken to implement the recommendations in the report of the task force.

In 1999 Dr. Clayman began a survey of all academic units with graduate programmes, to assess how well they matched the "ideal department" profile. The survey was completed by Dr. Jon Driver in the spring and summer semester, 2000. The results of the survey are presented here, and fulfil part of the requirement that the Dean of Graduate Studies report to the Vice-President, Academic about the implementation of the task force recommendations. I am pleased to report that responses have been received from all units surveyed.

The survey described nine characteristics of ideal departments, under six headings. Units were asked whether their programmes fit the description. While some units provided extremely detailed answers, others simply responded "yes" or "no" to each descriptor. The presentation of results here uses yes/no responses as the lowest common denominator, with additional notes when necessary.

At SFU graduate programmes are administered by faculties (e.g. Education), departments (e.g. History), schools (e.g. Computing Science), and steering committees (e.g. Liberal Studies). These are collectively referred to in this report as "units." The "ideal department" survey was sent to people responsible for administration of graduate programmes in individual units. This means that the three faculties which are divided into schools, departments and programmes (Science, Applied Sciences, or Arts) are represented by more responses than the two faculties (Business Administration and Education) where administration of graduate studies is coordinated at the faculty level. The survey therefore tends to emphasize the organization of graduate studies in research-oriented programmes, rather than in professional programmes. When professional programmes differ markedly from other graduate programmes this is noted below.

Questions and Responses

1. Recruitment

"The unit has a clear coordinated recruitment strategy (with enrollment targets) that meets available and projected resources and focuses on attracting the best candidates."

Responses were broken into three categories:

The unit has a recruitment strategy

Yes : 12 No : 21

(One unit had a recruitment strategy for one programme, but not the other)

There are enrollment targets

Yes : 20 No : 11

Recruitment is related to resources

Yes : 6 No : 12 Partly : 3 No response : 11

Notes:

- a. some units noted that the problem is to keep enrollments capped at a manageable size, not to reach enrollment targets
- b. when evaluating responses, "recruitment strategy" was taken to mean more than just a package of information and a website
- c. a number of responses indicated that individual faculty members were responsible for recruiting graduate students to particular research programmes
- d. a few units reported special efforts to attract top quality students

2. Admission

2A. *"No student is admitted into an academic programme without first being assigned either a senior supervisor or an interim advisor."*

Yes : 23 No : 4 N/A : 4 No response : 1

Notes:

- a. some professional programmes do not assign a senior supervisor before admission
- b. some programmes assign a supervisor after the second semester, following a standard package of courses

2B. *"All students are guaranteed a minimal level of funding for a fixed period of time (at least one year) and commitments after that are made on an annual basis."*

Yes : 16 No : 17

Notes:

- a. one unit makes the guarantee for doctoral students, but not masters
- b. some programmes are designed for fully employed people, and therefore this is not a concern (e.g. Executive MBA; EdD in Educational Leadership)
- c. units in Science and Applied Sciences tended to answer "yes" more frequently than other faculties

2C. *"Prior to accepting an offer of admission the student is made fully aware of expected times of completion, planned course offerings in the next year, and of funding and other resources (e.g. office, supplies etc.) that will be made available to them during their time in the programme. The unit accepts the responsibility for ensuring all commitments are met."*

Yes : 21 Yes (except course offerings) : 3 No : 8

Notes:

- a. quite a few units produce their own handbook which describes these topics

3. Courses

3A. *"Students when reading the calendar have a clear idea of what courses they can expect will be offered during their time at SFU."*

Yes : 20 No : 11

Notes:

- a. The number of "yes" responses may be inflated; some units offer core or required courses on a regular basis, but other courses in the calendar may not be taught regularly
- b. A number of respondents stated that their calendar descriptions were under revision because some courses were not being offered

3B *"The unit has developed a mechanism that provides graduate students with the opportunity to comment formally on courses and instructors."*

Yes : 24 No : 7

Notes:

- a. a number of "no" responses were accompanied by a statement that the small size of graduate courses meant that it would be difficult to keep comments anonymous

4. Governance

"Students are involved in the governance of the unit; they serve on the graduate studies committee and the library committee, participate in unit meetings and are represented on search committees and other committees as appropriate (in each case having the right to vote)."

Yes : 27 No : 3 No response : 1

Notes:

- a. This question should probably have been broken down into a series of shorter questions; detailed responses from some units suggests that there is a lot of variation in the role of graduate students in governance
- b. Two of the three "no" responses were from professional programmes

- c. Of the 27 "yes" responses, 6 indicated that graduate students were represented only on the graduate programme committee and/or at department meetings, and a further 3 indicated that graduate students were not represented on faculty search committees

5. Supervision

"The senior supervisor is responsible for supporting the academic programme of the student, preparing a thorough annual evaluation of the student's progress - where necessary indicating how any delays in or impediments to progress will be addressed, maintaining regular contact with the student, and assisting and advising the student in preparing articles for publication and in applying and interviewing for academic appointments."

Yes : 29 No : 1

Notes:

- a. The single "no" was from a professional programme, and the response noted that all these activities were undertaken informally.
b. Some units review progress more frequently

6. Unit environment

"The unit has developed a process for ongoing communication with the graduate students and graduate caucus."

Yes : 29 No : 1

Notes:

- a. Of the 29 "yes" responses, 11 stated that communication was achieved either through e-mail (6) or through representation of students on the graduate programme committee (5) or through a combination of the two (1). A few units reported that informal communication was important.

Comments and recommendations

The survey demonstrates that academic units at SFU conform closely to many of the task force's criteria for an "ideal department." Notably, most units assign a senior supervisor or advisor prior to admitting a student, many units provide a package of information to admitted students, graduate students often have the chance to comment on courses, there is a mechanism for communication with graduate students, supervision is taken seriously, and graduate students generally have some representation on some of the unit's governing structures. Overall, the responses indicate that there is considerable diversity in the way in which academic units perceive and organise graduate studies, and this diversity reflects different academic traditions and different types of programmes. For example, professional programmes in Business Administration and Education often attract students who are fully employed, whereas full-time students in Science depend more on funding from awards and research grants. Given this diversity, there seems little point in encouraging conformity for the sake of conformity.

However, there are some areas where units did not conform very well to the ideal department, and these are topics on which many units should reflect. First, recruitment is not a major concern for many units. I interpret this to mean that most units believe they receive more applications from qualified students than they can admit, and a number of comments in the survey responses support this view. It was somewhat troubling to find that many units do not link recruitment (especially targets) to available resources. An issue not addressed in the question or in most responses concerns recruitment of top students. The Dean of Graduate Studies provides special entrance

scholarships to help units create attractive financial offers for top students; this fund is spent regularly, which suggests that some units are making an effort to recruit highly qualified individuals. It is recommended that each unit evaluate its recruitment process, and that all units familiarize themselves with the special entrance scholarships.

Second, only about half the units offering graduate programmes are also able to offer a financial package for support during the student's first year. As noted above, such a practice is more common in NSERC-funded areas, where a higher proportion of faculty tend to hold research grants and where graduate students are often more closely involved with their supervisor's research. SFU provides significant levels of funding to graduate students through graduate fellowships, stipends, and internal awards, as well as through employment as teaching assistants. While we should continue to improve internal funding, I believe that faculty members should be encouraged to (a) apply more regularly for research grants, and (b) include funded opportunities for graduate students to participate in their research. This recommendation is directed primarily at units in SSHRC-funded areas, and should be addressed by faculty deans.

Third, although most units reported that graduate students were involved in the governance of the unit, the level of involvement was quite variable. Some units reported that graduate students were voting members of all relevant committees (including search committees), while others reported graduate representatives only on the graduate programme committee. As many respondents simply answered "yes", without specifying the nature of the involvement, it would be worth gathering further information on this question. This could be combined with further investigation of communication within the unit, which also seemed quite variable. For example, some units stated that communication was largely through e-mail messages, while others held regular meetings with the graduate caucus. It is recommended that graduate students negotiate these issues with academic units.