

S.07-85

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Senate Committee on University Priorities Memorandum

TO: Senate

FROM: John Waterhouse
Chair, SCUP
Vice President, Academic

RE: Report on Undergraduate
Curriculum Implementation (SCUP 07-28)

DATE: June 19, 2007

At its May 30, 2007, SCUP reviewed the Report on Undergraduate Curriculum Implementation. It is included here for the information of Senate.

encl.

c. S. Dench



UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM & INSTITUTIONAL LIAISON
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT ACADEMIC AND PROVOST

MEMO

TO: John Waterhouse, Chair, SCUP

FROM: Sarah Dench, Director, University Curriculum
and Institutional Liaison

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dench", is written over the "FROM" line.

RE: Report on Undergraduate Curriculum Implementation

CC: SCUS

DATE May 10, 2007

Attached for SCUP's review is a summary report on the implementation of the new undergraduate curriculum requirements. This report reflects the first two semesters of full implementation, and related activities leading up to Fall 2006.

Preliminary Report: Implementation of Undergraduate Curriculum Changes Spring 2007

The new undergraduate curriculum requirements came into effect in Fall 2006. Students admitted to SFU in Fall 2006 were subject to new admissions criteria (a minimum standard for demonstrated literacy and numeracy) and will be required to complete writing intensive, quantitative, and breadth courses as part of their undergraduate degree requirements.

Admissions

In an effort to ensure incoming students were better prepared for SFU's new curriculum requirements, minimum standards of literacy and numeracy were included in admission requirements, effective for new students entering SFU in Fall 2006 and thereafter. Information detailing the new admissions requirements for Fall 2006 was published in the SFU Calendar and recruitment materials (print and web) two years prior to coming into effect. This allowed for notice of the changes to schools, colleges and prospective students to assist with program planning and course selection. Some complaints were received that this amount of time was insufficient.

Using the Language Proficiency Index as an admissions screen rather than a placement test proved methodologically and administratively problematic, and so in December 2006 Senate approved changes to allow this test to be used to determine placement into FAL or W courses subsequent to admission. Further work has been done to harmonize the new literacy requirements with the English Language Requirement, approved by Senate in April 2007. The new English Language and Literacy requirements will provide clear information as to the range of alternatives by which students must demonstrate readiness for academic work in English.

Course Distribution

All Faculties except the Faculty of Health Sciences now have writing, quantitative and breadth courses offered as part of their regular course offerings. All departments with majors have W courses at the upper division, which is a graduation requirement. Supplemental funds have been provided to Faculty Deans' offices to address the need for additional instructional and TA costs in W courses.

Faculty	# W Courses	~ # W Seats
FASS	86	7345
Science	21	1060
FAS	11	1965
Business	1	660
Education	12	2025
Health Sci	0	0
Other (DIAL)	3	45
Totals	134	13,100

Faculty	# Q Courses	# B Courses
FASS	82	142
Science	193	33
FAS	27	13
Business	10	1
Education	8	8
Health Sci	0	0
Other (DIAL)	0	3
Total courses	320	200

In the past 2 semesters, there has been unused capacity in some of the purpose-built breadth-science courses. It is expected that these course spaces will be filled as more students subject to the new degree requirements move into our system.

Transferable College Courses

All of the local colleges from which SFU admits the majority of transferring students have certified some of their required, transferable English courses as W. Additionally, most colleges in B.C. have certified at least one "gate-keeper" W course, usually an English course.

College courses that transfer to SFU as designated credit and articulate to Q or B courses at SFU are now labeled as such on students' records. Some colleges with courses that transfer to SFU as undesigned credit have applied for and received the Q and/or B designations.

The process of working with BCCAT and BC colleges to submit courses to SFU committees for vetting and approval in the W, Q and B designations has been a significant undertaking, and the colleges' willingness to do so is testimony to the great strength of our relationships with sending institutions. Preserving full articulation of courses was critical in ensuring that college transfer students were not discouraged from attending SFU nor delayed in their time to degree completion.

Work is continuing to identify and certify transferable courses from colleges outside of BC and from other universities.

SIMS Issues

Incorporation of all of the above aspects of the Curriculum Initiative into SIMS has necessitated careful planning and some customization of the system, and a significant investment of time and resources. Some problems have yet to be resolved for full implementation and ease of use. Ongoing feedback is being provided from all areas of the university, and overall, when prioritizing the changes needed, a determination was

made to maximize benefits to the majority of students and departmental end users while minimizing costs where possible. Eventual implementation of advising modules in Peoplesoft will help to fully resolve outstanding issues and reduce the need for manual intervention.

Support to Students

Student Learning Commons

In order to provide co-curricular academic support for the new curriculum requirements, a Student Learning Commons was established in the SFU Library. The SLC is an academic learning centre with the mandate to assist and support students in their academic pursuits, with a focus on providing writing and learning support services. In the first two semesters of operation 4692 students attended 142 SLC program offerings. In the Fall semester, the SLC had 194 individual consultations, growing to 271 consultations in the Spring semester. Programs and services took the form of workshops, program or course integrated classes, peer education, on-line resources, orientations, and individual consultations.

SLC services are available on the Burnaby, Surrey and Vancouver campuses. The services of the SLC have been well used, with an anticipated heavy demand for writing support services.

FAL: Foundations of Academic Literacy

To assist students entering SFU with weaker backgrounds in writing, FAL X99 is offered through the Faculty of Education. In the Fall 2006 semester, 218 students registered in 16 sections of FAL X99. In the Spring 2007 semester, 121 students registered in 9 sections.

The course incorporates "low-stakes" and diagnostic writing activities intended to provide students opportunities to practice their writing skills. In addition to formative evaluation, students are assessed and assigned course marks based on evidence of active learning, collection and presentation of a portfolio of course work, and a group project with oral presentation and self-reflective evaluation components.

FAN: Foundations of Analytical and Quantitative Reasoning

To assist students entering SFU with weaker quantitative skills, FAN X99 is offered by the Department of Mathematics. In the Fall 2006 semester, 156 students registered in 4 sections of FAN X99. In the Spring 2007 semester, 126 students registered in 4 sections.

The department designed a Quantitative Placement test (and on-line practice test) to assist students in determining if their mathematics background is sufficient to succeed in Q courses. Support and advising for students in FAN and Q courses are available through re-tooled Math workshops.

Incorporating FAL and FAN into cohort or highly structured programs has proven challenging. Work is underway to offer compressed versions of the courses that can be

taken by students prior to the start of regular classes in the Fall semester. A pilot offering of a compressed version of FAL X99 will be offered in Summer 2007.

Support to Faculty

Many faculty who have redesigned or created courses for the Curriculum Initiative have accessed instructional development support through the Learning and Instructional Development Centre, which included the Writing Intensive Learning Office, and through the "Re-thinking Teaching" Workshops offered by Dr. Cheryl Amundsen. In 2005, the Annual Symposium on Innovative Teaching focused on pedagogical issues related to the new curriculum, and was well attended.

The curriculum certification committees (Writing Support Group, Quant/Breadth Support Group) were available for consultation and feedback as courses were developed, and typically certification of courses was an iterative process. As faculty gained familiarity with the criteria for the course designations, informal faculty peer assistance has also been highly effective.

The resources of the Writing Intensive Learning Office are now being redistributed to the Faculty Deans' offices. This will further integrate support for writing intensive learning into the disciplines. Approval has been given to the establishment of an Institute for the Study of Teaching and Learning in the Disciplines, with the purpose of enabling and supporting faculty-led inquiry into all aspects of teaching and learning at SFU.

Evaluation

Various facets of the Curriculum Initiative are now, and will continue to be, evaluated in consultation with the Vice President, Academic's office (University Curriculum and Institutional Liaison).

Questions relating to the experiences of students enrolled in W, Q and B courses are now included in the Undergraduate Student Survey. Preliminary data was collected in Fall 2006 through this survey, and findings indicated that responses to the new requirements (courses) were generally positive. The majority of respondents indicated that:

- W courses helped develop writing skills
- Q courses helped to develop problem solving and critical evaluation skills;
- B courses exposed students to new ideas and/or helped students to assess their values

Compared to students who had not taken W, Q or B courses, students who took designated courses were more likely to value the skills that the classes promote, and to feel more confident in their abilities. However, the data showed that many students found the new requirements confusing and recommended simplification (particularly with regard to breadth requirements). As data collection continues through the Survey, such findings will inform how to improve the delivery of information about the requirements to students. Considerable time has been spent over the past two years working with

advisors, and this will continue until advisors feel more confident in their own understanding of the requirements.

FAL and FAN are being assessed by the departments offering the courses, with summary reports provided to the University Curriculum office. The faculty member responsible for FAL in Education has applied for SSHRC funding for longitudinal research relating to the degree progress and experiences of students for whom FAL is required. Early feedback regarding FAL and FAN from students has been positive; students report feeling better supported and prepared academically. Ongoing evaluation is underway to track the efficacy of these courses and the academic performance of students who have completed the courses.

An important piece of feedback from students, faculty and administrators involved with FAL and FAN is that the additive nature of the credit for these courses is not well understood and, in some cases, is negatively perceived by students. Given that many students at SFU complete more than 120 credit hours for their degrees, consideration should be given to making the credits for FAL and FAN integral rather than additive.

The Student Learning Commons pilot programming is the subject of ongoing assessment as student supports are developed and refined. On the unit's website, <http://learningcommons.sfu.ca/about/reports.php>, statistics on usage of SLC services thus far are reported in summary form.

A researcher in LIDC is analyzing data collected over the past few years from faculty teaching "pilot" writing intensive courses, and a follow-up survey/interview protocol has been developed to update this information.