



MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION Senate **DATE** November 20, 2024 
FROM Dilson Rassier, Provost and Vice-President Academic, and Chair, SCUP **PAGES** 1/1
RE: Proposal for a Faculty of Graduate Studies and Terms of Reference for the Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly (SCUP 24 - 54)

At its meeting on November 20, 2024, SCUP reviewed and approved the proposal for a Faculty of Graduate Studies. In alignment with this motion, SCUP also approved the Terms of Reference for the Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly, and is recommending both items to Senate for approval.

Motion 1: That Senate approve and recommend to the Board of Governors the establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies, effective February 2025.

Motion 2: That Senate approve and recommend to the Board of Governors the Terms of Reference for the Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly, effective February 2025.

C: Mary O'Brien, Vice-Provost and Dean, Graduate Studies

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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION Senate Committee on University Priorities (SCUP) **DATE** November 13, 2024

FROM Mary O'Brien,
Chair of Senate Graduate Studies Committee (SGSC)

RE: Proposal for a Faculty of Graduate Studies



For Approval: At its meeting on November 12, 2024, the SGSC approved the proposal for a Faculty of Graduate Studies and is recommending it to SCUP for approval.

Motion: That the Senate Committee on University Priorities (SCUP) approve and recommend to Senate the establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies.

SCUP is asked to review the proposal to transition the Office of Graduate Studies into a Faculty of Graduate Studies. The attached proposal has undergone extensive consultations, as outlined in the memo to the SGSC, including with SCUP on September 11, 2024. All recommendations have been thoughtfully considered, and key changes that have been implemented as a result of SCUP and Senate feedback include the following:

- FGSA meeting frequency (bi-monthly) and composition in non-departmentalized faculties;
- autonomy around subject-area expertise and needs for accreditation;
- clarification around academic standards and program-level flexibility;
- supervisory “responsibilities”;
- clarification of membership in FGS; and
- Senate representation.

This final version is being submitted for your approval by the Senate Graduate Studies Committee on behalf of the Office of Graduate Studies.

MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION Senate Graduate Studies Committee **DATE** November 12, 2024
FROM Mary O'Brien, Vice-Provost and Dean, Graduate Studies
RE: Proposal for a Faculty of Graduate Studies

Motion 1: That the Senate Graduate Studies Committee approve and recommend to SCUP the establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies.

Motion 2: That the Senate Graduate Studies Committee approve and recommend to Senate revisions to the Graduate General Regulations to align with the establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies.

Background and rationale

Graduate students play a central role in SFU's research and teaching mission. Unlike at many peer institutions, Graduate Studies at SFU is an office. (See "The Canadian Graduate Studies Landscape" section of the proposal.) The establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies aligns with the *What's Next: The SFU Strategy*'s vision: "We are a leading research university, advancing an inclusive and sustainable future" as well as its purpose: "We create and connect knowledge, learning and community for deeper understanding and meaningful impact." By establishing itself as a Faculty, the structure of Graduate Studies will enable the following:

- enhanced collegial governance through its representative body, the Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly;
- greater transparency through regular unit reviews and having a requirement to report to Senate on such reviews;
- improved recordkeeping and supports for supervisors; and
- opportunities for interdisciplinary coursework and curricula.

Academic units will retain autonomy with regards to graduate admissions, curricula, and research. Current tuition flows to academic units will continue. Students, supervisors, and academic units will benefit from integrated supports (e.g., consistency of training; centralized recruitment; single, accurate record and associated consistency and protection of privacy) and opportunities (e.g., professional development, workshops, interdisciplinary coursework, opportunities for participation in collegial governance) that are afforded by a Faculty structure.

Consultation on the proposal has been deep and broad, as indicated below.

- Deans: March and April 2024 (individual meetings); June and August 2024 (Dean's Council)
- GS staff: March, April, June, and August 2024
- Strategic campus partners: March and April 2024 (via survey)

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- Senior Leadership: March and April 2024 (via surveys)
- SFUFA: April and September 2024
- Graduate Program Chairs and Graduate Program Administrators: April and June 2024
- Graduate Students' Society: April, May, July, and August 2024
- Senate Graduate Studies Committee: April, May, June, July, and September 2024
- Graduate supervisors: May, July, and August 2024
- FCAT, FASS Chairs, and Directors: September 2024
- Chairs and Directors: September 2024
- SCUP: September 2024
- Senate: October 2024
- Members of Indigenous communities and equity groups: October 2024

Materials for consideration

- The proposal for the establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies;
- Terms of Reference: SFU Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly (Appendix A);
- Current structure of Graduate Studies (Appendix B);
- Letters of support (Appendix C); and,
- Graduate General Regulation changes (Appendix D)



Mary O'Brien
Dean and Vice provost, Graduate Studies

Name of Institution: Simon Fraser University

Name of Faculty: Faculty of Graduate Studies

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Proposal for the establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies

Executive Summary

The purpose of this proposal is to establish the **Office of Graduate Studies (GS)** at SFU as a **Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS)**. Currently GS is an administrative unit that supports graduate students, supervisors, and colleagues in academic units, including Graduate Program Chairs and Graduate Program Assistants¹. SFU has recognized the need for one unit to carry out many of the academic functions of a Faculty of Graduate Studies and has been placing those in GS over time. As a result, GS performs many of the same tasks as Faculties of Graduate Studies across Canada (e.g., registration; recommendations for graduation; oversight and development of academic regulations; administration of and support for academic awards; support for development of new programs and revisions to existing programs; support of the graduate student experience; professional development). Unlike at most institutions, however, GS at SFU has status as an office. As indicated in the “Canadian Graduate Studies Landscape” section below, it is one of very few Graduate Studies units in Canada which operates as an administrative office, rather than a Faculty. Notably, both Universities of Victoria and British Columbia have Faculties of Graduate Studies². Establishing a Faculty of Graduate Studies will align with best practice in Canada.

The letter of endorsement provided by the Graduate Student Society (GSS) points to collaboration in the development of this proposal (e.g., GSS Council meetings, feedback from graduate student representatives) and points to several ways in which students stand to benefit from the establishment of FGS. As indicated in the letter of support provided by the GSS

¹ GPAs will continue to receive assignments from and be accountable to academic units.

² The Graduate School at the University of British Columbia functions as a Faculty of Graduate Studies. See the letter from Dean Michael Hunt in Appendix C of this document.

(Appendix C), students are especially supportive of opportunities for the development of enhanced standards that allow for program-level flexibility; greater participation in collegial governance; increased access to interdisciplinary work; and opportunities for broader participation in the SFU graduate community. Additional benefits include the ability to access a single, accurate student record and the resultant enhanced protection of privacy; and greater supports for the student-supervisor relationship. Broadly speaking, the ability of FGS to access a single source of accurate data will enable the tracking of milestones (e.g., attrition, time from completion of candidacy to thesis defense) consistently across students with the goal of engaging in cross-university discussions about student experience and outcomes at the FGSA.

By its very nature, oversight of graduate studies is a shared responsibility involving collaboration among supervisors, Graduate Program Chairs, Graduate Program Administrators, Associate Deans (Graduate) or equivalent, and Faculty Deans. The proposed model of shared responsibility in FGS will ensure transparency and greater participation in decision making. Key shared responsibilities include the following:

- student and supervisor recordkeeping;
- greater opportunities for student, supervisor and Graduate Program Chair training and support;
- recruitment support;
- policy development and support;
- program development and support;
- collegial governance;
- new interdisciplinary programming without a home in a single Faculty; and
- upholding SFU priorities as outlined in *What's Next* and future strategic plans, the Strategic Research Plan and the Academic Plan.

What are the problems to be solved by establishing a Faculty of Graduate Studies?

The current structure of an Office of Graduate Studies brings with it several key issues that have a negative impact on the integrity of SFU credentials:

1. lack of transparency associated with regularly scheduled external review and oversight by Senate;

2. limited collegial governance and lack of participation in decision-making by graduate programs and students³;
3. extreme decentralization and inconsistency in application of standards associated with recordkeeping (student and supervisor), policy interpretation (e.g., establishment of supervisory committees, progress evaluation), student experience and expectations;
4. absence of oversight of quality standards including academic guidelines (e.g., thesis completion options) and milestones (e.g., program candidacy requirements);
5. absence of an academic home for future interdisciplinary courses (e.g., a common language pedagogy course) and credentials (e.g., certificates) that cross Faculty boundaries; and
6. lack of alignment with best practice in Canada, where most universities have a Faculty of Graduate Studies.

A Faculty of Graduate Studies is the appropriate structure for these activities. The proposed changes will ensure greater consistency in student experiences, provide greater supports for graduate students and enhance the reputation of graduate programs at SFU.

With the establishment of FGS, academic units will continue to maintain their autonomy around teaching and research, and expectations associated with accreditation and subject-area expertise will be respected. Beyond attendance at FGS Assembly, there are no expectations of increased workload.

Why a Faculty of Graduate Studies?

Establishing a Faculty of Graduate Studies will ensure more representative collegial governance and compliance with the *B.C. University Act*⁴. FGS will have the appropriate academic structure for ensuring responsibility for current and future academic functions and regulations and will thus enable the establishment, delivery, and oversight of SFU's interdisciplinary graduate courses, programs (including INS), and credentials⁵.

³ Currently the governing body for Graduate Studies is the Senate Graduate Studies Committee, in which voting privileges are held by a Library designate, one Associate Dean from each Faculty and one Associate Dean from Graduate Studies, three graduate students and the Associate Director, Graduate Admissions, Records and Registration.

⁴ Faculties are also under the authority of the SFU University Policy framework, and they operate under the SFU General Research and Academic Policies framework.

⁵ Graduate Studies realizes that new interdisciplinary credentials can only be created in close consultation with Faculties and departments. It is essential that new courses and credentials be both of high quality and financially and academically sustainable. A top priority in the transition to a Faculty will be discussions with Deans and department

The following changes will be implemented as a result of the establishment of FGS:

- regular unit reviews for FGS (i.e., including FGS in the 7-year unit review cycle) with the requirement that FGS implement action plans associated with these reviews;
- the formation of a representative governance body to recommend FGS policy changes: the FGS Assembly⁶ (See Terms of Reference below.);
- the establishment of FGS as the faculty of registration and recordkeeping for graduate students and supervisors (i.e., a single and definitive set of student and supervisor records);
- revisions to and development of academic standards with opportunities for program-level flexibility (e.g., thesis format options, candidacy requirements, thesis / project defended like a thesis supervision)⁷;
- improved supports for existing interdisciplinary programming (i.e., the Individualized Interdisciplinary Studies program), new interdisciplinary course offerings (e.g., campus-wide pedagogy courses, internship opportunities for students in programs without internships), opportunities for new interdisciplinary credentials (e.g., certificates, diplomas, laddered Master's and thesis-based programs across units and/or in partnerships with interdisciplinary centres and institutes)⁸;
- enhanced commitment to serving all campuses (i.e., regular presence and workshops on all campuses); and
- enhanced supports for GPAs (e.g., workshops) and GPCs (e.g., workshops; regular discussions at FGS Assembly).

heads around interdisciplinary teaching assignments in the development of new, cross-Faculty interdisciplinary courses and credentials housed in FGS.

⁶FGS Assembly is designed to be a representative body akin to other Faculty councils. Within existing departments, there are usually Graduate Program Committees that recommend calendar and curriculum changes to Faculties. At the Faculty level, there are bodies (e.g., Faculty Graduate Studies Councils) that recommend calendar and other curricular changes to SGSC. Currently within Graduate Studies, policy changes come from the office and are recommended by SGSC without review or recommendation by the individuals who will be most affected, GPCs. Recently this has meant that policy changes have required multiple townhalls, surveys and other consultations. This change will not slow down the approval process but will ensure the appropriate levels of consultation and review before policy changes go to SGSC. GPCs will be strongly encouraged to attend to provide insights from their programs, to engage with proposed changes and to participate in broader training and discussions that will be offered as regular agenda items at FGSA.

⁷ Decisions related to admission standards beyond the SFU minimum, curriculum, specific program requirements, assessment of and expectations for graduate student performance remain the responsibility of the academic unit, subject to any Senate decision that supersedes the SFU minimum.

⁸ A Faculty of Graduate Studies could also promote interdisciplinary community-engaged scholarship.

FGS will lend expertise to student recruitment initiatives and the development, oversight and support for professional credentials and associated policies⁹. It will be the hub for coordinated professional, academic and research supports¹⁰ for graduate students across multiple units such as the Centre for Accessible Learning, International Student Services, the Indigenous Student Centre, Career and Volunteer Services, Ombudsperson and the Graduate Research Commons. Moreover, it will provide academic units with curricular and policy-related guidance when they embed principles of Truth and Reconciliation, the recommendations of the *Indigenous Pathways Report* and the Aboriginal Reconciliation Council's final report, *Walk This Path with Us*¹¹ and the principles equity, diversity and inclusion into their programs.¹²

As is currently the case, most graduate student research and teaching will be delivered within academic units. In addition, faculty appointments will continue to be administratively housed in academic units (departments and schools within departmentalized faculties, or in the case of non-departmentalized faculties, the faculties themselves) with attendant reporting structures and oversight. Graduate student funding will be administered as outlined in GGR 1.17 and program-level funding policies.

Background

GS had its most recent external review in 2008, and the recommendation at that time and in subsequent three-year plans was that it transition to a Faculty¹³. Because GS is not a Faculty, it is not subject to review. When it was exceptionally reviewed in 2008, the recommendation was made that it be transitioned to a Faculty. The reviewers noted the following:

⁹ Professional and cohort-based programs and Graduate Studies acknowledge a dearth of appropriate policies to support such programs, and Graduate Studies has committed to developing such policies. The structure of FGSA will ensure that GPCs from these programs have the opportunity to review, provide insight into and recommend such policies.

¹⁰ Programs that offer in-house professional development and supervisory supports will be encouraged to continue to do so. The Faculty of Graduate Studies will offer a suite of resources (e.g., an adaptable student-supervisor agreement) and workshops for supervisors (e.g., effective supervision, navigating conflict, and working with student teams) and students (e.g., IP, navigating conflict, knowledge mobilization) at all three SFU campuses.

¹¹ Graduate Studies at SFU is unique across Canada in having the position of Associate Director, Indigenous Policy and Pedagogy. This individual provides guidance and support to Indigenous applicants and students and to programs as they work to uphold Principles of Truth and Reconciliation in their policies and programs.

¹² Revised full program proposal templates call for proponents to address the Ministry of Higher Education requirements to a) provide specific benefits to Indigenous and traditionally underserved and underrepresented students in BC's post-secondary system; b) incorporate Indigenous content; and c) work with local First Nations on whose territory the institution is located, and with other First Nations or Indigenous groups or experts.

¹³ Additional recommendations from that review include, but are not limited to, enabling Graduate Studies to process RA scholarship payments, implementation of a centralized data management system, and registration of supervision. Because Graduate Studies was not a Faculty at the time, they were not held accountable to Senate to respond to the recommendations.

The main issue for us is that SFU administrative structure for Graduate Studies is, in several key aspects, very decentralized and in others (such as scholarships) it is centralized. Graduate Studies at SFU is neither fish nor fowl and its perceived importance, visibility and authority are correspondingly limited and subject to erosion [...] The SFU structure means that the Dean of Graduate Studies cannot effectively exert influence at the institutional level, nor can the Dean effectively enforce existing University policies despite the fact that the Dean is the final arbiter of the Graduate General Regulations [...] A key task for graduate deans across Canada is the maintenance of quality in graduate programs across the university. At present at SFU, this can be accomplished only through the personal effectiveness and suasion of the Dean, not through structure.

(Hall & Jablonski, 2008, p. 3-4)

Recent decisions at SFU have resulted in a new status for GS at SFU. The Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral¹⁴ Studies transitioned to the Office of Graduate Studies in October 2023, and the former role of Dean and Associate Provost is now that of a senior leader on campus, Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies.

The central role of graduate students is acknowledged in SFU's *Strategic Research Plan*. GS initiated a strategic planning process in December 2023, which involved discussions with Graduate Program Chairs, Graduate Program Assistants, Supervisors, Associate Deans, Graduate (or equivalent), campus partners, and SFU leadership. One of the priority areas identified in the process is the evaluation of the structure of GS within SFU. During strategic planning consultations, responses to the question of evaluating the structure of GS showed overwhelming support for the creation of a Faculty of Graduate Studies. From these consultations, additional recommendations around the structure of GS focus on the creation of efficiencies and roles that align with the core academic mission of the university; the desire for regular consultation with and feedback from colleagues working in graduate programs; the need for providing opportunities for reviewing the internal governance of GS; and the need for greater clarity around what GS does. All of this could be afforded by a Faculty of Graduate Studies. Moreover, a number of respondents indicated that it would be helpful to consider how units that oversee Graduate Studies at other universities function as a way of informing the future structure of GS at SFU.

¹⁴ Postdoctoral fellows are now overseen by the Vice-President Research and Innovation.

Key outcomes

The change to a Faculty of Graduate Studies will enable the following **key outcomes**, as laid out in the *BC University Act*¹⁵:

- a) “to make rules governing its proceedings, including the determining of the quorum necessary for the transaction of business”: Establishment of FGS Assembly (see TORs in Appendix A), made up of Associate Deans (Graduate), Graduate Program Chairs and staff and student representatives across SFU.
- b) “subject to this Act and to the approval of the senate, to make rules for the government, direction and management of the faculty and its affairs and business”: FGS Assembly will enable greater participation in decision-making from graduate programs and will ensure consultation and feedback on regulations, program change and shared supports for students, supervisors and academic units.
- c) “to provide for student representation in the meetings and proceedings of the faculty”: Students will participate in committees and working groups where appropriate.¹⁶
- d) “to determine, subject to the approval of the senate, the courses of instruction in the faculty”: FGS will continue to oversee the Individualized Interdisciplinary Studies graduate program as well as future interdisciplinary coursework and programming that does not have an obvious Faculty home¹⁷. Coursework within academic units will continue to be approved according to existing procedures (i.e., within academic units, at Faculty Graduate Studies Committees, and at the Senate Graduate Studies Committee).
- e) “subject to an order of the president to the contrary, to prohibit lecturing and teaching in the faculty by persons other than appointed members of the teaching staff of the faculty and persons authorized by the faculty, and to prevent lecturing or teaching so prohibited”: Supervisors will be registered with FGS, which provides guidance, supports and regulations regarding supervision (see GGR 1.6)¹⁸.
- f) “subject to the approval of the senate, to appoint for the examinations in each faculty examiners, who, subject to an appeal to the senate, must conduct examinations and

¹⁵ Powers and duties of faculties are quoted from the *University Act*, and examples are provided for illustration.

¹⁶ Due to privacy concerns (i.e., access to student records and reference letters), students may only participate in scholarship adjudication committees if they sign a privacy declaration form not to reveal personal data.

¹⁷ There are no plans for FGS to reduce the autonomy of academic units to offer the courses that they deem appropriate for their students or to centralize course offerings that are currently offered within academic units.

¹⁸ FGS will not play a role in the teaching being done by academic units, which currently determine who is authorized to teach within the units. It will only be responsible for assigning teaching staff for any interdisciplinary teaching that it oversees. Supervisory responsibilities will be recorded with the Faculty of Graduate Studies in accordance with GGR 1.6.3. Any changes to Graduate General Regulations (e.g., associated with supervision or any other academic matter) must be brought forward to FGSA for discussion and recommendation. See Appendix D for changes to the GGRs that will take place as a result of the establishment of FGS.

determine the results”: FGS will continue to oversee thesis examinations and will work closely with programs to establish standards, for example, around candidacy examinations.

- g) “to deal with and, subject to an appeal to the senate, to decide on all applications and memorials by students and others in connection with their respective faculties”: Graduate admissions to SFU are currently made by the Vice-Provost and Dean, Graduate Studies upon the recommendation of the graduate programs. GS is also responsible for registration and credentialing.
- h) “generally, to deal with all matters assigned to it by the board or the senate”: There are currently two Senate Committees that support the policies and administration of Graduate Studies: the Senate Graduate Studies Committee and the Senate Graduate Awards Adjudication Committee. GS has membership on most other Senate committees.

The transition to a Faculty of Graduate Studies also aligns with [University Policy A 13.06](#) “Responsibilities of Deans of Faculties”, which specifies that Deans are responsible for chairing a committee of Chairs, developing a budget, supporting curriculum development, and fostering and encouraging research.

Collaboration and supports

Establishing FGS as an academic—as opposed to a purely administrative—unit will enable the streamlining of recruitment and academic supports, information and systems, which will eliminate the need for individual academic units to create their own systems and support and reduce redundancies and mis-information, while also improving system information collaboration and providing consistent student, supervisor and curricular support across all units. It will decrease duplication and the associated temporal and budgetary inefficiencies.

FGS will maintain supervisory records¹⁹, and supervisors will be members of FGS. Membership in the Faculty of Graduate Studies will be automatically granted to continuing SFU research faculty at the rank of assistant professor or above and current graduate supervisors or co-supervisors who are continuing SFU faculty or professor emeriti. Membership will include a record of supervision, guidance and training on topics relevant to supervision (e.g., the use of AI in theses, RA funding), workshops and other professional development opportunities, and opportunities to provide feedback and advice on issues that are relevant to and promote high-

¹⁹ Supervisory records will be accessible to supervisors (e.g., to submit in TPC reviews), graduate programs (e.g., to determine whether a faculty member has supervised previously) and Graduate Studies staff (e.g., in the establishment of supervisory and examination committees).

quality graduate supervision. FGS membership will be granted to a supervisor in addition to their appointment in an academic unit. No academic appointments will be made in FGS. Supervisors will also be asked to provide feedback on existing and future supports. Records of supervision and committee membership, which will be recommended by academic units, will be recorded and tracked in a centralized database that is connected to the graduate student database.

Capacity to Support a Faculty of Graduate Studies

Current capacity

In spite of its lack of Faculty status, GS carries out a number of functions that a Faculty would provide, but without the proper governance and oversight functions that a faculty would normally have. These current functions include:

- Indigenous policy and pedagogy, including dedicated supports for Indigenous graduate students;
- Communications and marketing;
- Professional development and student experience support;
- Management of internal and external scholarships and awards;
- Academic student support;
- Scholarship and award adjudication and disbursement;
- System support;
- Data management;
- Admissions;
- Records;
- Registration;
- Individualized Interdisciplinary Studies graduate program;
- Policy development;
- Enrolment planning; and
- Curriculum support.

See Appendix B for the current structure of Graduate Studies.

Future capacity

The expectation is that FGS will, in its current configuration, be able to continue to provide the supports listed above but with the governance and oversight expected of a Faculty. This includes enhanced Senate oversight²⁰. Establishing a Faculty structure will enable consolidated supports

²⁰ The establishment of FGS will not increase the overall number of Senators.

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for supervisors, Graduate Program Chairs and Graduate Program Assistants, thereby enabling greater transparency and consistency across SFU. While there are no immediate budget implications²¹, the development of a central supervisor and student database will require both IT support and the hiring of an ongoing records coordinator as shown below. Graduate Studies does not currently have the capacity to support the centralization of recordkeeping²². Importantly, the development of the new records system will involve collaboration with academic units across campus to determine systems requirements. The goal will be to develop a robust and focused records system that meets the central needs of units and FGS.

Academic year	Initiative	Additional resources	Cost
2025–2026	Records software implementation	Software (one-time cost)	\$300,000
2025–2026 (and ongoing)		Records coordinator (ongoing)	\$100,000

Curriculum

Existing curriculum

GS is the home of the [Individualized Interdisciplinary Studies](#) (INS) graduate program. As a result, it oversees the academic journey of students working across academic units (including coursework and completion of milestones) and ensures continuity of supervision and funding. The INS attracts many Indigenous graduate students because Indigenous systems of knowledge(s) are inherently interdisciplinary. GS is also home to GRAD courses, which can be used for courses that are available to students across SFU (e.g., dual degree and cotutelle enrolments).

Proposed future curriculum

FGS has expertise in curricular development. At the same time, as a Faculty that is not grounded in a specific discipline or range of disciplines within SFU, FGS is well situated to increase offerings of interdisciplinary programming including, for example:

²¹ There will be no changes to the salary structure for any roles in Graduate Studies.

²² We note that there are a number of recordkeeping systems across SFU, and we will engage in broad consultation to ensure that the most appropriate recordkeeping system is chosen.

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- new interdisciplinary programs (e.g., interdisciplinary graduate certificates and diplomas leading to stackable interdisciplinary credentials; interdisciplinary specializations);
- new interdisciplinary professional development programs (e.g., mentorship and internship programming); and
- new GRAD courses (e.g., interdisciplinary pedagogy courses; interdisciplinary courses that involve subject matter that crosses faculty boundaries; interdisciplinary courses that involve instructors teaching across faculties).

The Canadian Graduate Studies Landscape

SFU's structure as an office, as opposed to a Faculty, is uncommon in Canada. The following universities have Faculties/Schools/Colleges²³ of Graduate (and Postdoctoral) Studies:

- [University of British Columbia](#) Graduate School
- [University of Victoria](#) Faculty of Graduate Studies
- [Athabasca University](#) Faculty of Graduate Studies
- [Brock University](#) Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs
- [Carleton University](#) Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs
- [Dalhousie University](#) Faculty of Graduate Studies
- [Laurier](#) Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- [University of Alberta](#) Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- [University of Calgary](#) Faculty of Graduate Studies
- [University of Manitoba](#) Faculty of Graduate Studies
- [University of Saskatchewan](#) College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- [York University](#) Faculty of Graduate Studies

Consultations

The following individual and unit consultations took place to date:

- Deans: March and April 2024 (individual meetings); June and August 2024 (Dean's Council)

²³ This is not an exhaustive list. While Schools of Graduate Studies generally function like Faculties, these have been left off the list. The Graduate School at the University of British Columbia and the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at University of Saskatchewan function as a faculty. A notable example is the University of Toronto, which functions like an office in that it does not oversee or offer any courses or credentials or have unit-level participation in collegial governance. McGill has an office of Graduate Studies that does not register supervision or offer any courses or credentials.

The Board of Governors at Kwantlen Polytechnic also [approved the establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies](#), effective September 2024.

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- GS staff: March, April, June, and August 2024
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- Senate Graduate Studies Committee: April, May, June, July, and September 2024
- Graduate supervisors: May, July, and August 2024
- FCAT, FASS Chairs, and Directors: September 2024
- Chairs and Directors: September 2024
- SCUP: September 2024
- Senate: October 2024
- Members of Indigenous communities and equity groups: October 2024

A revised draft of this proposal was shared online on a password-protected website with most of the above stakeholders from mid-June through late August 2024, and additional feedback was solicited.

Letters of support can be found in Appendix C.

Policies/procedures planned for ensuring ongoing review and evaluation

Once established, FGS will undergo regular external review and evaluation as part of SFU's external review process and will be required to report back to Senate according to the established timeline.

Urgency of Establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies and Next Steps

There are a number of risks associated with maintaining the current structure. These include, but are not limited to, a lack of oversight over conflicts; lack of insights from graduate programs; unnecessary duplication of work; fractured and inconsistent support for students, supervisors, programs (especially professional programs), GPCs and GPAs; the potential for privacy breaches; and a devaluation of the SFU brand. In addition, the insights of academic units are largely absent in the decision-making process. Furthermore, the current structure does not align with the *BC University Act*. All of these can have a negative impact on the student experience and the integrity of SFU credentials.

The risks associated with the establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies are few. The move toward standardization and enhanced centralized recordkeeping are a concern to some.

Nonetheless, a Faculty will enable enhanced transparency, academic programs will have a direct

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voice in collegial governance, by providing input on the establishment of standards and setting the strategic course for graduate studies at SFU.

Once FGS is approved, Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly (FGSA) will be established and begin its work at the beginning of the next term at the latest. Work has already begun to determine mechanisms for centralized recordkeeping, training, the development of interdisciplinary coursework and credentials, and the development of supports for high-quality supervision.

Appendix A:

Terms of Reference

SFU Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly²⁴

The Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly (FGSA) is a collegial governance body of the Faculty of Graduate Studies that represents academic units and the graduate supervisors in each academic unit via Graduate Program Chairs, who are ratified as representatives of their academic units. The FGSA is primarily responsible for recommending to the Senate Graduate Studies Committee a.) revisions or deletions to existing Graduate General Regulations; and b) new Graduate General Regulations. The Vice-Provost and Dean, Graduate Studies, will be the Chair of the Assembly. The Dean's assistant will serve as the Secretary of the Assembly.

Membership

1. Student Members (with voting privileges)
 - i. Six student members will be elected by the Graduate Student Society, including at least one student from the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Student Association (FNMIA)
 - These students must be graduate students registered full time in an SFU graduate program.
 - The Graduate Student Society will determine its own procedures for electing its representatives.
2. Staff members (non-voting)
 - i. Two graduate program staff members will be chosen through a nomination/voting process for staff members that support graduate programs from a list of nominees provided by academic units.
 - ii. Each Faculty shall determine its own procedures for selecting its nominees.
3. *Ex officio* members (with voting privileges unless otherwise noted)
 - i. Vice-Provost and Dean, Graduate Studies
 - ii. Associate Deans of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. One of the Associate Deans will be named Vice Chair of FGSA for a term of no less than one year.
 - iii. All Associate Deans, Graduate (or equivalent)
 - iv. All Graduate Program Chairs²⁵

²⁴ These Terms of Reference are modeled on those at peer institutions including [UBC's Graduate Council](#), [University of Calgary's Faculty of Graduate Studies Council](#), University of Alberta's Council of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, and [University of Ottawa Council on Graduate Studies](#).

²⁵ Graduate Program Chairs are ratified within academic units. As such, they are selected as representatives of their academic units.

- Non-departmentalized faculties will designate Graduate Program Chairs or equivalents for their various degrees / programs (i.e., MA, MSc, PhD, professional vs. research)²⁶
- v. Vice-President Research and Innovation or their delegate
- vi. Two faculty members of Senate elected by the Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly
- vii. Registrar
- viii. One representative from the SFU Library appointed by the Library
- ix. Faculty of Graduate Studies leadership staff (all non-voting)
 - Director
 - Associate Director, Indigenous Policy and Pedagogy
 - Associate Director, Communications, Marketing and Student Experience
 - Associate Director, Training and Awards
 - Associate Director, Business Solutions
 - Associate Director, Admissions, Records and Registration
 - Academic Graduate Student Support Specialist

Members who are unable to attend a particular Assembly meeting are encouraged to send a designate to that meeting.

Term of Membership

1. The term of membership for staff members will be three years.
2. The term of membership for graduate students will be one year.
3. There is no limit on the number of terms an individual may serve.
4. The membership of *ex officio* members automatically terminates when the member no longer holds the position by virtue of which they are a member.
5. If a member must be replaced, then a new member must be selected using whatever procedures the affected unit (Faculty, Graduate Student Society, or Library) deems proper.
6. In the event that a member is absent from two or more consecutive meetings, the Chair may agree to allow a substitute to be appointed for the duration of the absence of the member.

Responsibilities

²⁶ ²⁶ The Beedie School of Business and the Faculty of Education will each have up to ten Graduate Program Chair or equivalent members of the FGSA. The Faculty of Health Sciences will have three Graduate Program Chair or equivalent members of the FGSA. These members are in addition to the Associate Deans, Graduate and any student representatives from each of those Faculties.

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Members will:

- Become familiar with the role of FGSA.
- Attend FGSA meetings.
- Contribute meaningfully and respectfully to discussions and provide constructive feedback and critical insights on material that comes before FGSA.

Role and Responsibilities

FGSA has the authority to:

- propose and recommend to SGSC new Graduate General Regulations that pertain to academic matters;
- propose and recommend to SGSC substantive changes or revisions to or elimination of existing Graduate General Regulations;
- review and discuss annual strategic and work plans for FGSA;
- review and recommend changes to procedures that accompany regulations;
- advise the Vice-Provost and Dean, Graduate Studies on issues related to Graduate Studies at SFU; and
- carry out additional duties that are delegated or assigned by Senate.

Powers and Duties

Under the University Act, the Faculty of Graduate Studies has various powers and duties relating to the academic quality of graduate studies at SFU. FGSA is empowered to carry out its powers and duties subject to conditions or restrictions imposed by Senate. FGSA may delegate its powers and responsibilities as it sees fit and may revoke the delegation of any of its powers. FGSA is ultimately responsible for any delegates, standing or ad hoc committees and working groups. The powers and duties of the Faculty of Graduate Studies are:

- propose rules and regulations for the governance, direction and management of the Faculty of Graduate Studies;
- to advise the Vice-Provost and Dean on scholarships and financial support for graduate students;
- to advise the Vice-Provost and Dean on strategic priorities for the continuous improvement of graduate education at SFU; and
- to review and recommend to SGSC new policies and changes to existing policy.

Quorum

Quorum for FGSA is 30% of eligible voting members.

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Meetings

- Meetings will be scheduled bimonthly (i.e., every two months) between September²⁷ and June. Notice of the annual meeting schedule will be shared with FGSA members at least one month before the September meeting. A regular meeting may be cancelled by the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies if there is neither urgent nor sufficient business.
- The agenda for each meeting will be developed and sent by the Faculty of Graduate Studies at least one week in advance of the meeting. Any matter that is not already included on the meeting agenda may, at the request of a member from the floor of FGSA and at the discretion of the Chair, be included on the agenda under Other Business. Any member may request in writing to the Secretary of the Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly an agenda item for the next meeting of the Graduate Assembly. Such items must be sent to the Secretary of FGSA at least eight days in advance of the meeting.
- Any member of FGS (i.e., any supervisor) who is not a member of FGSA may attend any FGSA meeting in a non-voting capacity.
- Non-members of FGSA (e.g., additional Faculty of Graduate Studies staff) may be included in meeting invitations.
- Additional regular or special meetings to discuss particular topics may be called by the Chair or by a request that is supported by:
 - i. 25% of the membership of the Assembly; or
 - ii. 5% of the membership of the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

FGSA members must be given least two days' notice of special meetings. Any accidental omission or irregularity of any notice of any meeting does not invalidate any proceedings at a meeting.

- Visitors to meetings may address FGSA if they have received prior permission from the Chair.
- If a person who is not a member or a guest approved by the Chair wishes to address the Assembly at any meeting, such person may do so if he or she has received the prior permission of the Chair. As much as possible, meeting materials will be provided to the Assembly electronically one week in advance of a scheduled meeting.

Absence of Chair

If the Chair is unable to attend an FGSA meeting, the Vice-Chair will chair the meeting. If neither the Chair nor the Vice-Chair is present within 15 minutes of the start of a meeting, that meeting will be cancelled.

²⁷ The September meeting will be an informational meeting with all Associate Deans (Graduate) from the teaching faculties, faculty and staff members of FGS and graduate programs (GPAs and GPCs).

Conduct of Meetings

At the discretion of the Chair, meeting may be held completely in person, completely remotely or in a hybrid manner. All attempts should be made to permit participants to both communicate and interact adequately for the entirety of the meeting.

The Chair (or Vice-Chair, in the absence of the Chair) is responsible for orderly conduct of FGSA meetings. The Chair may consult Roberts Rule's for guidance, but it is up to the Chair to ensure the collegial conduct of any meetings. The Chair has discretion to make a final determination on matters except where a motion challenging a decision has been moved, seconded and carried by 2/3 of members present at the meeting. When this happens, a member may propose a new ruling as long as it is moved, seconded and carried by a majority of members present. This decision will be binding.

Only members may move, second and vote on motions, which will be decided by a show of hands. Voting by proxy is not allowed. An affirmative vote of a majority of the members present and eligible to vote, or consent without objection, is required to pass a motion. The Chair does not have a vote except in the case of a tie. It is up to the Chair to declare that a motion has been carried. Any member may ask that their vote (including abstention) be recorded in the minutes. A declaration must be made by the Chair of the meeting that a motion has been carried. Any member may ask at the time of the vote that the member's individual vote or abstention be recorded in the minutes.

Electronic Participation

If an FGSA meeting is either hybrid or held completely remotely, the meeting must be conducted as outlined above. A person participating in a meeting remotely is deemed to be present at the meeting and may vote through the method of communication being used

Resolutions in Writing

Resolutions in writing may only be carried out for straightforward motions or where it is not feasible or practical to call a meeting of FGSA. These should be used infrequently. Any resolution in writing may be circulated for approval via email or electronic poll, and the results will have the same effect as if it had been recommended at a meeting of FGSA.

Minutes

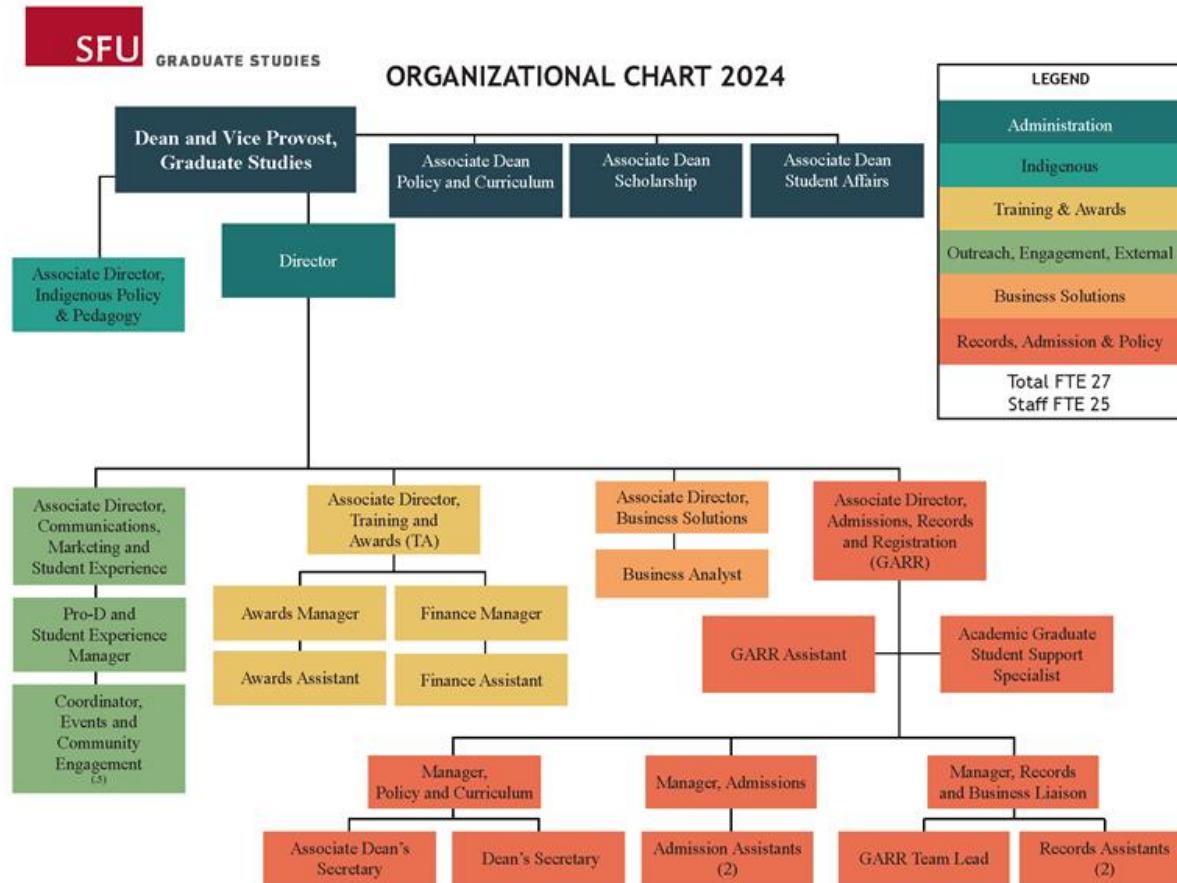
Minutes of all FGSA meetings and records of all decisions made outside of a meeting will be created as presented to FGSA for approval at its next meeting. Assembly must keep minutes and a record of all actions taken as permanent records.

Working Groups of the Graduate Assembly

The terms of reference of any working group that is developed by FGSA must be approved by FGSA. Working groups will report their activities to FGSA as required. FGSA may establish ad-hoc working groups and may also, by resolution, dissolve any working group.

Appendix B:

Current Structure of Graduate Studies²⁸



²⁸ Within Graduate Studies, only the Associate Deans and the Dean are academic staff members. The Dean is seconded to the office for 100% of their time, and the 50% of the duties of Associate Deans are in the Associate Dean portfolio. The Director oversees the administrative work of the office and works closely with Associate Directors in four key areas: communications; training and awards; business analysis; and admissions, records and registration.

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Appendix C:
Letters of Support



The Graduate Student Society at Simon Fraser University

August 19, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

The Councillors of the Graduate Student Society (GSS), during their August 13, 2024 meeting, have endorsed the proposal for the creation of a Faculty of Graduate Studies at Simon Fraser University. Over the past several months, Dr. Mary O'Brian, Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, spoke with the GSS Executive Committee about the proposal, presented the proposal to GSS Council and, after revising the original proposal, presented a version that was circulated to our Council members earlier this summer. It is this revised proposal that was endorsed by the GSS.

We would like to once again express that the GSS is excited about the possible benefits a Faculty of Graduate Studies could provide for students. In our anticipation of this proposal we had highlighted the following opportunities:

1. Establishing some basic standards that graduate students would expect to have entering any program at SFU, while at the same time allowing for program-specific flexibility, as appropriate.
2. Bolstering participation in macro level decision making of students and faculty with direct experience with the governance and delivery of numerous graduate programs.
3. Increasing the access to interdisciplinary research, events and spaces available for students and faculty.
4. Working with the GSS to create a “graduate community” to overcome the isolating program and subject specific nature of graduate studies.
5. Working closely with the Senate and Board of Governors to ensure that there is broad and continued support within the SFU community for the establishment and implementation of a Faculty of Graduate Studies.

The proposed structure demonstrates that the process of developing this proposal has been responsive to opportunities we have highlighted as well as concerns that were raised. We hope that this proposal is supported and embraced by SFU's academic leadership including the Senate, faculties and departments. On behalf of our members, we look forward to working with Graduate Studies on the next phases of this important initiative.



Pierre Cenerelli
Executive Director

30 April 2024

Senate Graduate Studies Committee
Simon Fraser University
8888 University Drive
Burnaby, B.C.
V5A 1S6

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing in support of the proposal recommending the Office of Graduate Studies at SFU be transitioned to a Faculty of Graduate Studies. As Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Dalhousie, I was asked to provide some insights on the benefits of the proposed change. Below, I list some of the advantages that should follow from the proposed transition, if approved.

One of the most obvious benefits is the creation of a Faculty Council. A Faculty Council will ensure greater representation in decision making, provide an opportunity for those involved in graduate education to share best practices and ultimately improve the engagement of academic units. A council also provides an important conduit for information exchange between the Faculty and academic units.

The transition to a Faculty would provide greater consistency across the university in the application of regulations and policies. Consistency is necessary for ensuring a fair and equitable student experience. The change would also reduce duplication of effort between graduate studies and the academic units. This can streamline processes and increase efficiencies. Although some academic units may perceive this change as an overstep by administration, they generally appreciate the increased efficiencies and the decreased administrative burden.

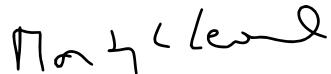
A Faculty of Graduate Studies is also an important resource for all those engaged in graduate education. For instance, the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Dal has an Associate Dean who helps resolve student/supervisor conflict. Students are often more comfortable speaking with someone outside their home unit, where they may perceive their concerns are not kept in confidence. The Faculty also provides resources on best practices in graduate supervision, guidance on holistic admissions, and help navigating scholarship applications, amongst other services. Centralizing resources ensures they are available to all students, staff and faculty involved in graduate studies.

Finally, graduate students are critically important to the research and academic mission of Canada's universities. This, no doubt, explains why many universities have Faculties or Schools

of Graduate Studies. The creation of a Faculty of Graduate Studies at SFU would recognize the critical role of graduate students and bring SFU in line with many, if not most, of Canada's universities.

In closing, I hope this reflection is helpful and wish you the best in your deliberations. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marty Leonard".

Dr. Marty Leonard
Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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DAL.CA/grad



May 6, 2024

To whom it may concern,

I am pleased to submit this letter in support of Vice-Provost and Dean Mary O'Brien's initiative to obtain faculty status for the Office of Graduate Studies at Simon Fraser University. I am currently the Vice-Provost and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at the University of Alberta, and our role in supporting the institutional mandate is embedded in our integration into the institutional governance structure through our status as a faculty.

Status as a faculty provides for a key governance body through our faculty council, where leaders, faculty, students and graduate studies coordinators from across campus regularly convene and determine together the key policies, procedures and practices that bring consistency and predictability that support student experience and provide resources for supervisors. This critical faculty council group provides a place for us to integrate our institutional mission and goals into the ways in which we approach graduate studies (and postdoctoral research) and to apply the collective knowledge and decisions we make uniformly across our campus.

Another key feature we possess as a faculty is the ability to build, implement and offer programming. This is imperative for providing the professional development and ethics training that is applicable to all students on our campus and provides them with necessary opportunities to explore diverse career possibilities and learn about their responsibilities as academic citizens. Our ethics and academic citizenship training further educates students around the codes and rules that apply to their behavior, avenues they can explore when things go wrong, and the ways in which we are addressing our mission as a university to address the truth and reconciliation commission's calls to action around decolonization. In the current environment of rapidly evolving graduate education, faculty status for the graduate studies mission provides an avenue for universities to build interdisciplinary programming and support the adoption of innovative programming structures that can expand learner populations and make graduate school more accessible.

Endowing the Office of Graduate Studies with faculty status will solidify the critical registrarial, record-keeping, administrative and support functions required for strong graduate education. It will provide the Office of Graduate Studies with the governance and programming structures that can intentionally and strategically integrate graduate students into the research and education missions of the university. For all of the reasons that Dr. O'Brien mentions in her proposal, I strongly support the adoption of faculty status for the Office of Graduate Studies at Simon Fraser University – ultimately, this will result in increased ranking, reputation, and impact.

Sincerely,



Tracy Raivio
Professor, Vice-Provost and Dean



May 2, 2024

Re: Establishment of the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Simon Fraser University

To whom it may concern,

Please accept this letter of support with respect to the establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies at Simon Fraser University. As Dean *pro tem* of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at the Vancouver campus of the University of British Columbia, I am acutely aware of the challenges faced in the effective administration and academic innovation of graduate education in Canada, and the benefits of consolidating responsibility and oversight within a singular unit. While a non-Faculty administration unit/office can oversee tasks such as admissions, registration and student records, and financial tasks, conducting these tasks isolated from the academic mission and insight that governs the process and structure of these tasks creates inadequacies, inefficiencies, and inconsistencies. I would also strongly argue that this interconnectedness between the administrative and academic leadership is more important to graduate education than at the undergraduate level.

Situating graduate education and excellence within a Faculty provides a singular and consistent voice across the university, as well as a common source of information and partnership for stakeholders. From a governance perspective, being a Faculty affords certain rights and responsibilities with respect to policy development, oversight, and enforcement that a non-Faculty centralized office simply cannot attain. As a result, having a Faculty of Graduate Studies will promote thoughtful and relevant discussion on graduate education policy matters, while at the same time providing a definitive body on academic decisions under policy. At UBC, we have found it necessary and effective to have the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies to be the point of contact for university-wide academic policies relevant to graduate education, as well as the point of entry and endorsement for program-level changes to policy or curriculum.

Being a Faculty also affords us the opportunity to play a crucial, and official, role in the development and review of graduate programs. We are seen as a collaborative and informed partner in these ventures that is able to provide a wide-scoping view of the current and future state of graduate education across the institution, nationally, and internationally. Having this wider perspective on the state of graduate education improves innovation while minimizing redundancy and unnecessary delays. It is also imperative that as a Faculty we are present at meetings and governance bodies to shepherd these processes efficiently and effectively. We simply wouldn't be able to do this without "Faculty" status.

There is also the advantage of being seen as a partner and leader when it comes to processes of discipline – both for students and individuals involved in the supervision of graduate students. Being a Faculty affords the authority, but more importantly the responsibility, of upholding policy and intervening as necessary when required. By being the singular governing body on



these matters, a Faculty is better able to position each case within historical context that ensures procedural fairness and consistency.

Of course, situating graduate education within a Faculty does not come without its challenges. There is always the risk that individual programs may feel that they are losing their autonomy in academic decision making in their unit. While there is some element of reality to this when implementing university-wide standards and expectations, it has been our experience and belief that wide consultation and engagement with stakeholders throughout the process produces consensus on direction and process. I firmly believe that having a multitude of varying standards, expectations, and processes at the program level diminishes the academic mission and integrity of the university as a whole, and should be discouraged. In the end, it is important that there is open and transparent two-way communication between the Faculty and the individual units, and if effective, will enhance the programs, the university, and the wider community. It is our position that these relationships are best fostered when we are seen as collaborative partners, rather than “gatekeepers”, and this is something that we have strived to do at UBC.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide support to this proposal. I would be happy to provide any additional information or answer any additional questions, as needed.

Kind regards,

Michael A. Hunt PhD, PT
Dean *pro tem*, Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
Professor, Department of Physical Therapy
University of British Columbia, Vancouver campus



May 8, 2024

Dr. Mary O'Brien
Dean and Vice-Provost, Office of Graduate Studies
Simon Fraser University

Dear Mary:

I am writing to provide my strong support for your proposal to establish a **Faculty of Graduate Studies** at Simon Fraser University.

As you know, the predominant model for institutional oversight and shared responsibility of graduate programs is one in which these programs comprise an **academic Faculty** - to be sure, one with a very different structure and function from other "line" (discipline-based) Faculties. There are a number of compelling reasons for a Faculty of Graduate Studies to have academic *and* administrative oversight/responsibility of graduate education. These include (1) broad consistency in **academic standards**, thereby ensuring and protecting institutional academic reputation, and quality of credentials. This consistency in turn facilitates more efficient student mobility between graduate programs (e.g. ladderizing or transferring); (2) providing broad consistency in the **graduate student experience**, by providing clarity and consistency in policies, protocols, and procedures. (3) the existence of broadly consistent policies and procedures provides opportunities for **administrative efficiencies** and reduction of duplication, by ensuring that any number of processes (approvals, payment mechanisms, etc.) are applied consistently across campus.

Clearly the overarching theme here is "consistency" and I use the qualifier "broadly" alongside it. To be fair, the nature of graduate education does require flexibility and recognition of differences between disciplines and fields of study. In this regard, well-crafted Faculty of Graduate Studies policies can achieve the institutional consistencies mentioned while still providing opportunity for interpretation by each academic unit. Furthermore, institutional academic policies created by a **Faculty** (as opposed to an office) of Graduate Studies carry the benefit of being created and approved by democratic governance structures and processes that define the Faculty.

If you need anything further from me please don't hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Hicks".

Dr. Robin G. Hicks
Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies



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May 8, 2024

Mary O'Brien
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies
Office of Graduate Studies
Simon Fraser University

Dear Mary,

Thank you for sharing the draft proposal for the formation of a Faculty of Graduate Studies, an important development of Simon Fraser University. I am pleased offer this letter of support regarding the establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies at Simon Fraser University. Graduate studies is unique in the need to span the research and academic programming spheres.

To provide context for my expertise, I served as Vice and then President of Western Canadian Deans of Graduate Studies from 2021-2024 and the experience of having been in administration of graduate studies at two research intensive institutions. First, in the roles of Vice Dean/Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (now Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies) at University of Alberta (2015-2019) and subsequently Dean of the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at the University of Saskatchewan since July 1, 2020. In these roles I have also experience two different collegial governance systems to which graduate studies intersects.

When I entered these leadership roles in both institutions, it followed fairly recent studies to determine if the Faculty/College should remain as an academic unit. In light of these challenges to the existing structures, I delved into trying to understand why graduate studies had been set up typically as Faculties in Canada, mostly prior to the 1950s, and why they were under such scrutiny. It seems that their initial purpose was to create institutional standards by world standards for graduate studies during the period Canada's evolving research strength in their universities. This initial purpose led to many becoming highly bureaucratic and overly focused or perceived as focusing on enforcing regulations in rigorous manner and what might appear to students as a draconian fashion and geared almost exclusively on the production of the next generation of tenure-track faculty. For me, this perception was juxtaposed with the energy in the community of graduate deans and many faculty who were excited to meet the need of a changing landscape in recognizing the value of graduate degrees to a vast array of careers in a knowledge-based economy, the transformation of doctoral/academic research from a highly individual pursuit to one requiring a broad skill set in collaboration and leadership, evolving in terms of EDI and to decolonize the academy, and the pressures that compromise the mental well-being of students and faculty alike. I am glad to say, that in both institutions the decision was made not to disband the units, rather, impetus to reform Graduate Studies was undertaken to ensure the unit was best serving the needs of the students and programs.

In both institutions in which I have led transformative changes for graduate education, fundamental to improving how graduate studies serves graduate faculty and graduate students is the ability to work



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through the collegial council for the Faculty of Graduate Studies that had representation from each unit that delivered graduate programs. Through my tenure I have overseen restructuring of graduate student funding, implementation of a new admissions and scholarship application systems, development new quality assurance practice for graduate programs, development of institutional program learning outcomes, implementation of professional development strategies for graduate students, numerous changes to policy and practice to imbue a more student-centred, inclusive and empowering approach for graduate students in their broad career trajectory to name a few.

The reason a representative council was critical to the success of making those changes is the importance of hearing from the needs of the various units given the massive diversity of types of programs covered as well as ownership by the “boots on the ground” graduate leaders in the units take over these changes when they have been fully vested in their crafting. Moreover, as completely pleasing everyone is not usually possible, the engagement of the key stakeholders through the process has meant that even those who do not agree wholly with the changes, have noted how they did respect for the decision-making process and gained understanding of the needs of disparate disciplines. In addition, the council has served as a place for sharing of innovation and best practices for program delivery in way that I cannot imagine occurring through smaller committees or ad hoc consultation. I personally make it a point to develop strong relationships with the Graduate Chairs who populate the council, and as a the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, provide them with professional development opportunities and encourage their development as leaders.

Another key benefit of being an academic unit is the ease to which programming that is pan-institutional for graduate students can be mounted under the graduate studies auspices. For example, at USask, the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies directly offers an Interdisciplinary Studies program that is becoming a flagship program in terms of innovating new modalities and recently attracted one Trudeau and two Vanier Scholarship recipients. Along with the standard training in ethics courses, we also offer a certificate in teaching preparation, a professional skills certificate and a non-credit course for international students to acclimatize to the local academic context.

There are many benefits to students as well, including creating a voice for them in the collegial processes of Graduate Studies as well as the consistency and adoption of best practices throughout the university. There is also great benefit to the structure of a Faculty for graduate studies in the engagement of faculty as members and stakeholders and in providing direct supports such as training in mentorship. There can also be awareness of the importance placed on the quality of supervision in the processes created for registration with a Faculty of Graduate Studies. The Faculty structure also serves as more neutral venue for dealing with the most challenging issues that do arise between students and faculty in removing the students’ perception that the leadership within the departments always sides with the faculty. Although an office of graduate studies can provide this support, students do appreciate that they are registered in Graduate Studies and that we have the broader experience in making the important decisions that impact students’ individual progression in their programs.

To conclude, I have often described the portfolio of graduate studies as a hybrid unit for academic leadership and central administrative support. I firmly believe organizational and governing structures should be designed with clarity of purpose and clarity of roles and responsibilities. I hope that I have



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provided context that will help other to understand the benefits of creating a Faculty of Graduate Studies at your university.

Best wishes with the proposal,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Burshtyn".

Debby Burshtyn
Dean Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
Professor Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology

Appendix D: GGR Changes

Notes: Only sections with changes are included. Changes are highlighted in red.

1.2 Administration of the Faculty of Graduate Studies

Dean and Vice-Provost, Faculty of Graduate Studies

The dean is responsible for the general supervision of graduate work at the university and chairs the Faculty of Graduate Studies assembly and the senate graduate studies committee.

Committees

The committees responsible for the supervision of graduate students are the supervisory committee, graduate program committee, the faculty graduate studies committee, the Faculty of Graduate Studies assembly and the senate graduate studies committee. The functions of these committees in relation to individual students are as follows.

Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly

This committee will propose and recommend to the Senate Graduate Studies Committee new Graduate General Regulations that pertain to academic matters and substantive changes or revisions to or elimination of existing Graduate General Regulations; review and recommend changes to procedures that accompany regulations; review and discuss annual strategic and work plans for FGSA; and advise the Vice-Provost and Dean, Graduate Studies on issues related to Graduate Studies at SFU.

Faculty of Graduate Studies Information

A wide range of additional information on graduate studies at Simon Fraser University may be found on the university's website at www.sfu.ca/gradstudies.html. In addition, most departments offer publications describing their graduate programs. These are available directly from the departments and are usually posted on the department's web sites.

1.3.2 Application for Admission

Application is through the [online application system](#). Completed applications and accompanying materials must be submitted to the department before the deadline specified by the department. Applicants are advised to check with the appropriate department as to the prevailing application

procedures and deadlines for the graduate program in which they are interested. Applicants are advised that deadlines for applications for awards and teaching assistantships may be earlier than the deadlines for application to a graduate program.

All decisions on graduate admissions are made by the senate graduate studies committee, on recommendation from **the Faculty of Graduate Studies Assembly and** graduate program committees. Decisions on admissions shall be final. Final approval of admission for non-degree students or exchange graduate students is by the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies.

1.3.11 Admission as an Exchange Student

Bona fide graduate students at other universities who wish to complete courses at Simon Fraser University, not leading to a degree at this university, will be admitted to complete specific graduate courses on the recommendation of the chair of the department (or equivalent officer) and the dean of graduate studies at the other university, and with the permission of the appropriate graduate program committee and the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies at Simon Fraser University.

1.3.12 Admission as a Visiting Researcher

Simon Fraser University accepts visiting research students under the terms of the Canadian Graduate Student Research Mobility Agreement. For details, see [Visiting Research Students](#) on the **Faculty of** Graduate Studies website.

1.4.5a Leave of Absence

From time to time, students find it necessary to interrupt their studies. In this case, they must apply for a leave of absence. Students should discuss their intention to take a leave with their supervisor and graduate program. Students may consult with **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies regarding their leave eligibility and options. Leave requests are approved by **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies with the acknowledgement of the graduate program.

During a leave of absence students normally should not use any of the university's facilities or resources, or undertake academic or research work related to the program from which they have taken a leave of absence.

Typically, a leave of absence begins on the first day of an academic term and approval for the leave is obtained before the term begins. If the leave is required at any other time of the term, students should consult with **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies to discuss options. Students in their first term should apply for an admission deferral rather than a leave of absence. A retroactive request for a leave of absence normally will not be allowed.

Students on an approved leave will not receive university minimum funding during the term of leave. Applicable funding will be resumed in the next enrolled term. Except for students on a leave that counts towards time to completion, time on leave will not be counted against terms of minimum funding. For more information regarding the minimum funding policy, see [GGR 1.17.8](#).

Similarly, awards for which the terms and conditions are established by SFU will be interrupted at the onset of the leave of absence and will resume at the termination of the leave period, provided the student returns to full-time study at that time. The duration of the award will not be changed from the time the award was initiated. Awards for which the terms and conditions are not established by SFU will be paid according to the terms and conditions established by the donor or granting agency.

There are two categories of leave:

1. Leaves that count towards time to completion
2. Leaves that do not count towards time to completion

Leaves that count towards time to completion may include leaves for personal or professional reasons. Documentation is not required. Up to three terms of leave may be taken under this category.

Leaves that do not count towards time to completion may include, but are not limited to, leaves for military service or those for medical, compassionate or parental reasons. Supporting documentation is required. The maximum time to completion will be adjusted accordingly but all other program requirements and academic unit expectations will remain the same.

A student may initially request up to three terms of leave. Students who require more than three terms of leave may submit a request for renewal to be reviewed by [the Faculty of Graduate Studies](#). Students are required to submit supporting documentation for initial and renewal requests. Renewal requests require a rationale, and additional documentation may be requested by the review committee.

A student may be asked to provide documentation from their clinician to confirm that they have recovered sufficiently to return to their course of study at the end of a leave for medical reasons. If medical documentation is submitted for reasons related to a physical or mental disability, the student has a legal entitlement to disability accommodation.

Students completing the requirements for their program past the normal completion time, as the result of having taken three or more terms of leave, may be required to repeat courses/comprehensive examinations or complete additional courses at the discretion of their graduate program committee. Responsibility for approving these additional degree requirements

rests with the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies and the chair of the student's graduate program committee.

1.5 Graduate Grading Systems and Policies

The cumulative grade point average (CGPA) is the cumulative average of the grade points earned in the Simon Fraser University graduate courses completed towards a credential. Each letter grade is assigned a numerical equivalent, which is then multiplied by the unit value assigned to the course to produce the grade point. Grades without a numerical equivalent are not included in the calculation of the grade point average.

Term grade point average (GPA) is computed by dividing the total grade points earned by the total units completed in the term to the second decimal place.

An individual student may request permission to have the grading basis changed or to take a course as an audit by applying to their supervisory committee. If that committee concurs, the request will be submitted to the graduate program chair followed by **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies for approval. The grading basis change must occur no later than end of week two. Students are permitted to use no more than two S/U courses, for a maximum of six units, towards their minimum course work requirement under [1.7.2](#). None of the student's minimum course work requirement under [1.7.2](#) may be completed as audit.

1.6.3 Supervisor

For degrees that culminate in a thesis or a project examined as a thesis, the supervisor must be a continuing Simon Fraser University faculty member at the rank of assistant professor or above including professor emeriti. Associate members may serve as the supervisor in their affiliated academic units at the discretion of the academic unit's graduate program committee. Where a co-supervision arrangement is created, the co-supervisors jointly act as a supervisor as per [1.6.5](#).

For degrees that culminate in a project examined by two readers, extended essay, field or comprehensive examination, the supervisor must be a Simon Fraser University faculty member deemed to be qualified by the academic unit's graduate studies committee and approved by the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies.

The appointment of a supervisor should occur as soon as possible after the student's admission to the graduate program, but normally no later than the student's second term.

An interim supervisor may be permitted as needed. A supervisor who will be unable to perform their regular duties for more than three months is required to arrange for proper supervision of the student by another supervisor, co-supervisor or committee member during this absence. The

graduate program committee and the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies shall be informed in writing of the arrangement.

A supervisor is not required for students in a graduate diploma or certificate program. The director of a diploma or certificate program is responsible for roles normally assigned to the supervisor.

1.6.5 Co-supervision

A co-supervision arrangement may be created when two individuals exercise the degree of supervision and support of a supervisor. When a co-supervision arrangement is created, all documentation must be approved by both co-supervisors.

Appointment as co-supervisor recognizes a significant contribution of time, expertise or financial resources. The supervision of the student remains a joint responsibility of the co-supervisors.

Adjunct faculty member, practitioner faculty, lecturers, visiting faculty, limited-term research faculty, and an off-campus professional who is academically qualified to advise graduate students all may serve in the capacity of a co-supervisor.

One of the co-supervisors must be a continuing Simon Fraser University faculty member, at the rank of assistant professor or above, or professor emeriti. Departments and faculties are responsible for setting criteria and standards appropriate to their disciplines.

Co-supervisory status may be terminated by the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies if one or both of the co-supervisors are unable to fulfill their responsibilities in compliance with Simon Fraser University policies and procedures relevant to graduate supervision.

1.6.6 Change in the Supervisory Committee

Continuity of supervision is important in all graduate work. As a consequence, a change in supervisory committee, especially a change in supervisor, may be made only on the basis of strong reasons.

A request for a change in the supervisory committee may come from the student or any member of the supervisory committee. It shall be sent to the graduate program committee accompanied by the reasons, in writing, for the proposed change. If the graduate program committee concurs in the request, it shall be sent to the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies for final approval.

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1.7.7a Transfer Credit

A student may apply to receive transfer credit towards the requirements at Simon Fraser University if they are planning to take courses at another institution.

To receive transfer credit, the following conditions apply:

- a) Application shall be made at least one month before the course/courses start and shall be reviewed by the graduate program committee and be sent to the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies for final approval.
- b) The student shall maintain enrollment, not on leave, at Simon Fraser University while completing the course(s) at another university under these provisions.
- c) The minimum grade required is a B, although the grade achieved will not be included in the calculation of the cumulative grade point average.

1.7.7b Advance Credit

If a student completed graduate courses prior to being admitted at Simon Fraser University, they may apply to receive advance credit.

To receive advance credit, the following conditions apply:

- a) The courses must not have been applied toward the requirements for a previously completed credential, unless this is permitted in the Senate approved program requirements.
- b) The courses must have been completed within three years of starting the Simon Fraser University program.
- c) The minimum grade required is a B, although the grade achieved will not be included in the calculation of the cumulative grade point average.
- d) Application for advance credit must be approved by the graduate program committee and the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies, either before admission or within the first year of enrollment.

1.8 Progress and Withdrawal

1.8.1 Progress Evaluation

For master's and doctoral students, the supervisory committee shall report on the student's progress at least once each year. This report will be sent, in writing, to the graduate program committee with a copy to the student and **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**. The evaluation of student progress in course work will rely in part on their maintenance of a CGPA of 3.0, as required by graduate regulation [1.5.4](#).

For graduate diploma and certificate students, a progress review will be initiated if the CGPA drops below 2.5.

1.8.2 Review of Unsatisfactory Progress

If unsatisfactory progress is identified by the supervisory committee, the supervisory committee shall make a written report to the graduate program committee, and provide a copy to the student. The student concerned has the right to appear before the graduate program committee when the case is considered and is permitted to bring a support person. The student may submit any materials relevant to the case. The decision of the graduate program committee must be one of three options:

1. If the student's progress is assessed satisfactory despite the supervisory committee's report, inform the student of satisfactory progress with a letter, and meet with the supervisory committee to review the areas of concern. This option is unavailable if the student's CGPA is below the university minimum.
2. If the student's progress is assessed unsatisfactory, and/or if the student's CGPA is below the university minimum, inform the student with a letter that includes a remediation plan to attain university minima within three terms.
3. If the student's progress is assessed unsatisfactory, inform the student with a letter that requires the student to withdraw from the university.

Letters documenting any outcomes must be copied to the dean of **the Faculty of Graduate Studies** and the associate director, graduate admissions, records and registration.

In the event there are allegations of academic dishonesty, falsified documents, or misconduct, the graduate program committee may not withdraw a student from their program under this policy. A separate process must be followed as outlined in [Policy S10 \(Academic Honesty and Student Conduct\)](#).

Any decision of the graduate program committee may be appealed to the appeals subcommittee of the senate graduate studies committee, by submission of an appeal to the dean of **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**. The decision of the appeals subcommittee shall be final.

1.9 Preparation for Examinations

Master's Students

1.9.1 EXAMINING COMMITTEE FOR A MASTER'S DEGREE CANDIDATE

Each candidate for a master's degree under [1.7.2a](#), [1.7.2b](#), or [1.7.2c](#) will have an examination.

The examining committee for examinations under [1.7.2a](#) and [1.7.2b](#) shall have the following minimum composition:

- a) the chair of the student's graduate program committee, or designate, who shall be a non-voting chair of the examining committee. If the chair of the graduate program committee is also on the student's supervisory committee, the chair shall designate a member of faculty at this university, who is not a member of the student's supervisory committee, as chair.
- b) all members of the student's supervisory committee.
- c) an examiner who is a member of faculty, or a person suitably qualified, who is not a member of the student's supervisory committee. For a thesis examination in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, normally the examiner may not be a member of the student's department, unless a waiver is granted by the dean of arts and social sciences or designate.

Examination of projects (under [GGR 1.7.2b](#) program requirements) may have a different examination process if it has been designated by the appropriate faculty graduate studies committee with the approval of the dean of **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**. When the project is live, taped or filmed, only one presentation is required for examination, and a digital copy is required for deposition in the library.

All examinations under [1.7.2a](#) and [b](#) shall follow publication and copyright outlined in [GGR 1.11](#).

For students' completing under [1.7.2c](#) the examination is examined by two readers, designated by the appropriate faculty graduate studies committee with the approval of the dean of **the Faculty of Graduate Studies** or designate. Examinations under [1.7.2c](#) may be required to be

submitted to the library. If mandatory, this requirement will be listed on the program requirements in the Calendar and shall follow publication and copyright outlined in [GGR 1.11](#).

1.9.4 THE ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

The external examiner should be a distinguished scholar with particular research and supervisory experience in the field of the thesis research. The examiner shall be free from potential conflict of interest. The external examiner may participate in person, video/telephone conference or in absentia.

The external examiner shall be asked to report on the thesis. This report will normally be submitted two weeks before the examination date to the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies or designate. In the event the external examiner is examining in absentia, the report should be extensive and give a recommendation for the examination outcome (see [1.10.2](#)). The report may contain specific questions the external examiner would like posed to the candidate. Those questions shall be directed to the candidate during the examination by the chair of the examining committee or members of the examining committee selected by the chair.

If the report states that the thesis is ready for examination, a copy shall be sent to the chair of the graduate program committee for distribution to all members of the examining committee before the examination. The contents of the report will not be communicated to the student until after the defence with permission of the examiner.

If the report recommends that the examination be postponed, the dean or designate shall send a copy to the supervisor and the chair of the graduate program committee. The chair of the graduate program committee and the supervisor will inform the student of the content of the report. The chair of the graduate program committee shall report to the dean or designate whether the examination will take place as scheduled or be postponed.

1.9.5 PREPARATION FOR EXAMINATION OF DOCTORAL THESIS

Preparation for the examination of a doctoral thesis shall not take place until the thesis is substantially complete and in the required format. See the Thesis Assistance website for information.

The candidate's supervisory committee shall make a recommendation to the chair of the graduate program committee concerning the composition of the examining committee (in conformity with [1.9.3](#)) and the date, location, and time of the thesis examination. Upon approval of the chair of the graduate program committee, this recommendation, along with the thesis and all relevant documentation, shall be sent to the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies or designate for final approval no later than six weeks before the examination date.

Once approved, the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies or designate shall formally invite the external examiner and distribute digital copies of the completed thesis to the examining committee.

The examination of the thesis shall take place under the regulations for thesis examination given in [1.10.1](#).

1.9.6 NOTIFICATION OF DOCTORAL THESIS EXAMINATION

Once the examination has been approved by the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies or designate, the chair of the graduate program committee or designate is responsible for notifying the candidate, examining committee, faculty dean(s), and the university community of the approved date, location, and time of the thesis examination. This notification should happen no later than two weeks before the examination date.

Any changes to the date, location, and/or time of the thesis examination must be approved by the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies or designate. The chair of the graduate program committee or designate is responsible for informing the candidate, examining committee, faculty dean(s), and the university community. The dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies or designate is responsible for notifying the external examiner of any changes.

1.10 Examinations

1.10.1 Thesis Examination

The candidate shall give an oral account of the research on which the thesis is based and defend the thesis itself. The candidate must be prepared to answer questions on the field of the research and related fields.

Thesis examinations are open to the university community. Copies of the thesis abstract shall be made available to all those attending the examination. The chair of the examining committee shall allow proper opportunity for questions on the thesis to come from persons who are not members of the examining committee but are attending the examination. The dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies or designate shall have the right to attend all phases of the examination.

After the chair of the examining committee is satisfied that all relevant questions have been answered, the examining committee shall meet in camera to classify the thesis.

1.11.1 Partial Copyright License

Except as noted in 1.11.3, the student shall sign a partial copyright license which grants to the university a non-exclusive worldwide, irrevocable, royalty-free license to reproduce, convert, publish, archive, communicate and distribute the thesis. Multiple copying is not permitted without written permission from the author except that, if the author is unobtainable, the dean of **the Faculty of** Graduate Studies may give this permission.

1.12 Time Limit for Program Completion

1.12.1 Time Limit

The time limit for students in a graduate certificate, diploma, or master's program to complete all of the requirements is nine terms from the start of the program. The time limit for students in a doctoral program to complete all of the requirements is 18 terms from the start of the program, or in the case of a student who has transferred from a master's into the doctoral program, without completing the master's, 18 terms from the start of the master's program.

The time limits for program completion are not intended to be the normal times for completion. These limits take into account a wide variety of extraordinary circumstances and events that may delay completion. It is expected that most students will complete their program before reaching the time limit. Individual academic units may specify their expectations of normal program completion times as a guide for determining whether a student's progress is satisfactory.

Some students may find it necessary to interrupt their studies by taking a leave of absence. The time taken for a parental leave, medical/compassionate leave, or academic break will *not* be counted towards the time limit for program completion. The time for a personal leave will be counted towards the time limit (see [1.4.5](#)).

Students with long-term disabilities should discuss their situation with the Centre for Students with Disabilities early in their graduate studies or as soon as possible after the condition is diagnosed. The Centre will assist the student, and their department, in developing a plan for program completion, which may include an extension beyond the normal time limits. Such plans must be approved by the dean of **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**.

1.12.2 Extensions

Students may apply for an extension to the time limit if they are enrolled in a master's or doctoral program and need more time to complete the program requirements. A single extension may be for one to three terms, and students may be granted more than one extension. A master's and doctoral program can be no longer than the time limit plus six terms of extended time. Extensions may be *less than* the maximum of six terms and must meet the criteria established by the academic unit. Students should contact their academic unit to confirm the specific extension policy for their program.

Applications for an extension must be submitted no later than the term in which the time limit or current extension expires. Extensions are not available to students who are discontinued from their program. Students are required to maintain continuous enrollment throughout their extension and are eligible to go on medical/compassionate or parental leave (see [1.4.5](#)).

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Extensions are approved by the supervisor, graduate program chair and the dean of **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**.

1.13.3 Transcripts

Certified official transcripts of the student's graduate academic record may be obtained from **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**. Only individually signed copies with the university seal are valid. For further information on cost refer to [Graduate Fees](#).

1.16 Graduate Student Appeals

Graduate students are advised to seek informal resolution of problems through discussions with their supervisor, graduate program chair, department chair or faculty dean, and the dean of **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**.

1.17 Minimum Funding

1.17.1 Scope

This policy applies to SFU graduate programs offering PhDs. Professional doctoral programs are exempt from this policy.

Programs may, but are not required to, fund graduate students in additional programs. This information is provided in program-level funding policies (see [GGR 1.17.16](#)), which must be approved by the respective Graduate Program Committee and **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**.

1.17.2 Funding Levels

Starting in September 2024, every graduate program offering a PhD will provide annual funding of at least \$28,000 to all eligible PhD students.

Program-level funding policies may establish minima that exceed those laid out here. Program-level minima take precedence over those established here.

Programs are encouraged to fund continuing PhD students (i.e., those who began or who were initially offered admission to their programs before September 2024) at these levels. The extent to which a program provides minima to continuing students is outlined in each program-level funding policy.

1.17.3 Funding Term

Every PhD student who meets the eligibility requirements will receive annual minimum funding for at least 12 terms of enrollment from the start of the first term in attendance. Additional funding beyond 12 terms may be available at the discretion of programs, which are encouraged to consider circumstances or requirements that may require some students to take longer than 12 terms for their programs and to allocate funding to those students accordingly.

1.17.4 Funding Sources

The funds included in program-level funding policies are varied. The funds may come from, but are not limited to, any of the following internal and external sources:

- scholarships and awards disbursed by **the Faculty of Graduate Studies** (e.g., PhD Research Scholarship, base allocation student support (BASS)-funded awards such as Graduate Fellowships (GF) and Minor Research Awards);
- program-specific awards or scholarships (e.g., donor awards);
- scholarship funding provided by a supervisor;
- employment TA assignments;
- employment RA assignments;
- sessional teaching;
- other external scholarships or awards (e.g., Tri-Agency awards, Mitacs).

To ensure more stable funding, when a student receives scholarship funding from a supervisor grant, every effort should be made to ensure that these funds are predictable throughout a funding year.

PhD students who are funded by major funding sources external to Canada (e.g., foreign government funding) or by another external body (e.g., workplace sponsorship funding) to an amount equal to or greater than the amount established in [1.17.2](#) may be admitted without additional funding pending approval from **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**. In such an instance, as long as the student remains eligible for funding as outlined under [1.17.8](#), the graduate program accepting the student—with support from the department and/or faculty where applicable—must assume responsibility for funding the student if the external funding is discontinued.

1.17.5 Excluded Funding Sources

Funding from an organization associated with First Nations, Métis or Inuit groups will not be considered funding under this policy. PhD students who receive such funding are eligible for the full minimum funding amount outlined in this policy.

1.17.6 Responsibility

According to [Graduate General Regulation 1.3.1](#), students are admitted to graduate programs. Funding commitments are therefore made on behalf of the graduate program, which is responsible for ensuring that the student is funded for the duration of the guaranteed funding period. Oversight of funding minima is shared by supervisors, supervisory committees, graduate program committees, faculties and **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**.

If a supervisor who provides financial support to a student becomes unable to meet their funding obligations (e.g., illness or departure from SFU), it is the responsibility of the program with support from the relevant department and/or faculty to meet program-level funding minima. Funding provided by **the Faculty of Graduate Studies** will continue to flow to students whose supervisor funding is discontinued.

1.17.7 Funding Guarantees

Programs will provide all eligible students with a statement of guaranteed minimum funding in their offer of admission letters issued by **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**. These will outline potential funding sources but do not need to indicate the precise sources of funding over the course of the program. Letters provided by programs will provide more specific details. Specifics must include the amount of the annual funding minimum, number of funded terms, and program-specific conditions for continued funding. The annual funding amount must meet or exceed the program-level minimum.

In addition, students must be provided with term-specific or annual information about their funding sources (e.g., value of TA assignments, expectation of the number of TA assignments accepted per year by the student, RA assignments, scholarship funding). Variability in funding per term across any year should be minimized.

When students accept RA or TA assignments in addition to the guaranteed sources of funding throughout the academic year, the funding associated with the sources of funding defined in the annual minima should not be reduced as long as students continue to meet the expectations associated with satisfactory performance and satisfactory progress in the duties associated with existing assignments.

1.17.8 Eligibility

Minimum funding has been established to support students who are not engaged in professional work. Students who are working professionals might not receive a minimum funding guarantee. Except when a student holds professional employment, a student's eligibility to receive funding will not be affected by outside employment as long as they are making satisfactory progress.

A student's guaranteed funding depends on their enrollment in their graduate program, a CGPA of 3.0 or higher, satisfactory progress in the program as outlined in [GGR 1.8.1](#) and satisfactory performance in teaching assistantships (as per Article 13 (c) 3b) and research assistantships. Programs are encouraged to make use of the GPR to report on satisfactory progress. Up to the end of the third term of enrollment, a student's progress may be deemed satisfactory in cases where the student has met the CGPA requirement but does not yet have an official report of student progress. Unsatisfactory performance in teaching assistantships must be documented via a Teaching Assistant Evaluation. Any unsatisfactory performance must be reported to the Graduate Program Director.

Students who are on an approved leave of absence do not receive guaranteed university funding while on leave. Normal funding minima will resume upon students' return to regular enrollment. Except for students who take a personal leave, time on leave does not count against the terms of guaranteed minimum funding.

Students enrolled in Co-operative Education or Internships will not receive program-level funding during Co-op or Internship terms. Time in non-required Co-operative Education or Internship programs will normally be included in the 12 terms of guaranteed minimum funding.

If a thesis, research or teaching supervisor indicates that a student is not making satisfactory progress, the supervisor must work with the Graduate Program Chair and Graduate Program Committee to review the student's performance. Unsatisfactory performance may result in an overall reduction of funding, but funding may not be reduced or withheld without approval of the Graduate Program Chair and [the Faculty of Graduate Studies](#).

1.17.9 Self-Funding

Programs may exceptionally recommend admission of self-funded PhD students to the Dean and Vice-Provost of [the Faculty of Graduate Studies](#) with a rationale that includes the following:

- a) the availability and agreement to provide appropriate supervision;
- b) evidence of the student's ability to fund themselves (e.g., affidavit of support or sponsorship);
- c) an indication that the student will have access to all necessary materials and equipment;
- d) future funding opportunities available to the student; and
- e) a contingency plan that outlines what will happen in the case that the student's personal funding source is no longer viable.

As long as the student remains eligible for funding as outlined under [1.17.8](#), the graduate program accepting the student must assume responsibility for funding the student if the student is no longer able to self-fund. The final decision on admission of self-funded students will be made by the Dean and Vice-Provost of **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**.

1.17.10 Refusal of Specific Funding Sources

When a program-level funding policy allows for the assignment of TA or RA funding, scholarships, or awards, and a student fails to apply for TA or declines the assignment, scholarship, or award in a given term, the annual funding offered to the student will be reduced by the amount associated with the funding that has been declined or not applied for. This may result in annual funding that is below the guaranteed minimum.

1.17.11 Impact of Winning Non-Departmental Scholarships and Awards

Graduate students are encouraged to apply for competitive scholarships and awards available outside of their academic unit (e.g., donor awards, open faculty or university-wide awards, external agency funds, such as Mitacs, CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC funding). These competitive scholarships and awards contribute to the guaranteed funding minimum. Programs may require students to apply for scholarships and awards as an eligibility condition for future funding.

When students are successful in securing competitive scholarship and/or award funding outside of their academic unit's adjudication, other sources designated to meet minima may be reduced. This is only while the award funding is being paid (i.e., programs are not required to pay the entire minimum funding amount congruently with the scholarship funding). In these cases, the student being awarded a scholarship or award must receive more funding than originally planned, but programs may revise their portion of the funding minima as per the program-level funding policy. This model enables programs to both reward scholarship success and to more equitably distribute funds among students in their programs.

Program-level funding policies must provide information about the amount and sources of funding adjustments associated with winning competitive scholarships and awards.

1.17.12 Transfer from Master's to PhD Program and from a PhD Program to a Master's Program

Students who transfer from a master's to a PhD program within the first three terms of their master's must receive a minimum 12 terms of PhD funding. Students who transfer from a master's to a PhD program after completing more than three terms of a master's must receive

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funding associated at least nine terms of PhD funding, regardless of time spent in a master's. Transfer from master's to PhD is not normally permitted after six terms of enrollment.

Students who transfer from a PhD to a master's program will only receive funding if

- a) the master's program into which they transfer guarantees funding to master's students; and
- b) the transfer takes place within the guaranteed minimum funding period associated with the master's program.

No time will be added to the guaranteed minimum funding period.

1.17.13 Funding Students with Accommodation Needs

The overall funding received by all students in the program, regardless of whether a student requires an alteration of their working environment, curriculum format or other modification to content to make progress in their coursework or research, must meet or exceed the funding minimum. Students with documented accommodation needs may require more time or additional resources to complete their graduate program. Programs are encouraged to work with the student, **the Faculty of Graduate Studies** and/or the Centre for Accessible Learning to determine how to address these needs with the goal of achieving equitable outcomes.

1.17.14 Sharing of Funding Information

Programs must do their best to track funding that students receive from funding sources as outlined in [1.17.4](#) and students' status as working professionals. Students are expected to inform their program immediately if they receive any additional internal or external scholarships or awards or if they become working professionals over the course of their graduate program. Failure to report additional funding sources or professional employment may result in a reduction of future funding. Funding may only be reduced in consultation with **the Faculty of Graduate Studies**.

1.17.15 Tuition and Fees

Students are responsible for paying tuition and fees. When a student owes fees associated with tuition or fees, it may prevent them from enrolling in their graduate program in future terms.

1.17.16 Program-Level Funding Policies

Each graduate program must establish a funding policy that is consistent with this Minimum Funding Policy. These policies must be approved by Graduate Program Committees and departments and/or faculties, where appropriate, and:

- a) include the program's definition of equity as it applies to funding;
- b) provide a realistic expectation of the time that students will take to complete the graduate program;
- c) indicate the number of terms that students will be funded;
- d) establish a funding level that meets or exceeds the amount set out in [1.17.2](#);
- e) indicate the extent to which future funding is based on students applying for external scholarships and awards (or equivalents);
- f) indicate potential sources of funding that count toward meeting the minimum funding level;
- g) indicate the timing of students' funding payments throughout the year (i.e., whether equal payments will be provided every term or whether payments may fluctuate over the academic year);
- h) provide information about the impact of Co-operative Education or Internships on the number of eligible terms of guaranteed funding; and
- i) clearly delineate program-level adjustments in the case of winning scholarships and awards.

1.17.17 Policy Review

This policy must be reviewed and adjusted, at a minimum, every three years. Policy revisions will apply to newly-admitted students.