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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION Senate

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

RE: Graduate Studies 2025-2030 Strategic Plan

DATE January 10, 2025



For information: At its meeting on January 7, 2025, the SGSC reviewed and unanimously approved the Graduate Studies 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. The SGSC is presenting it to Senate for information.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND PRIORITIES

2025-2030





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A black and white photograph of a modern building interior. In the foreground, a white grand piano sits on a tiled floor, with a metal folding chair positioned next to it. The background shows a large, open space with a concrete wall and a glass-enclosed upper level. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights.

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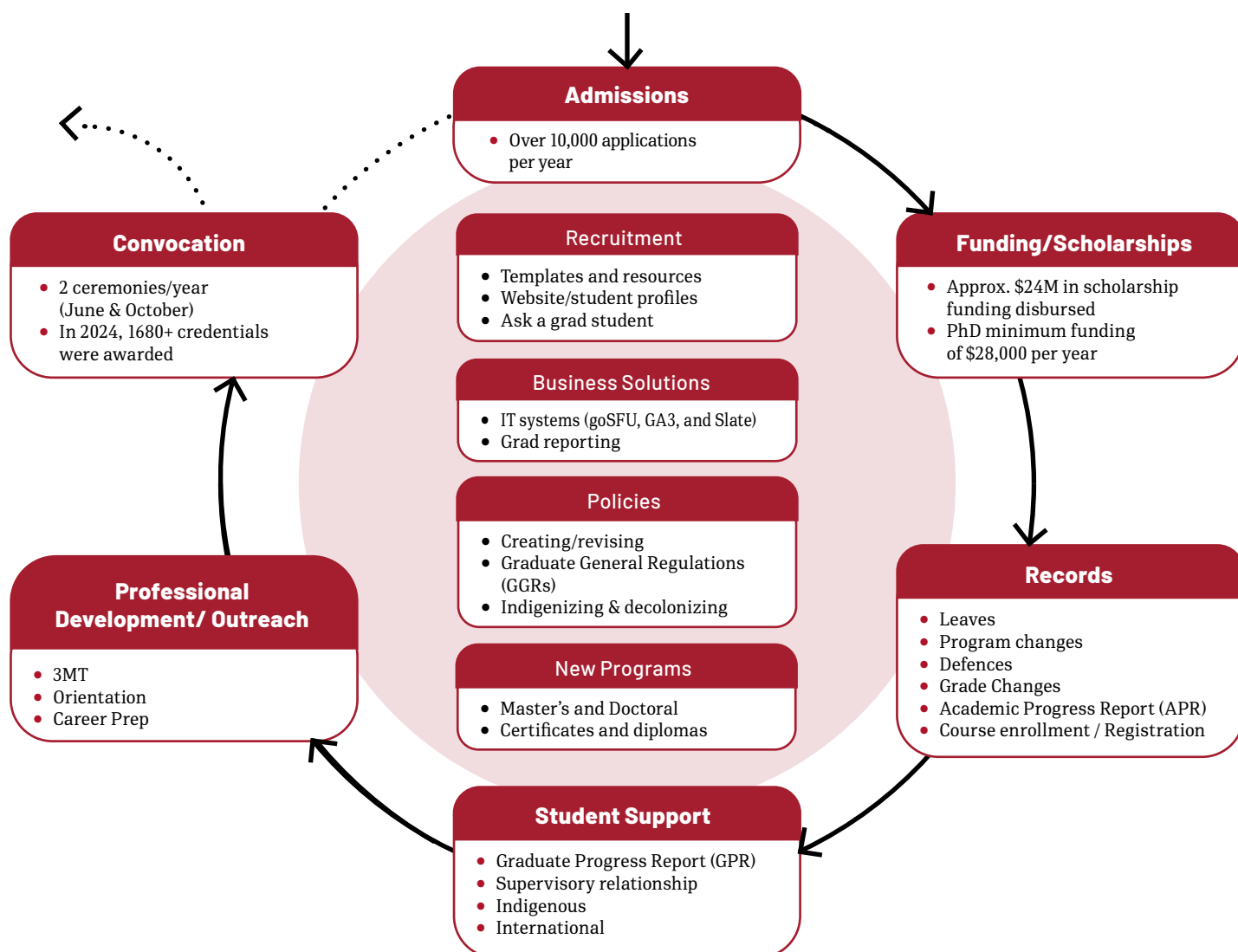
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WHAT WE DO IN GRADUATE STUDIES



MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



As Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, I acknowledge the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), q̓ícəy̓ (Katzie), k^wík^wəłəm (Kwikwetlem), Qayqayt, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo and Tsawwassen peoples on whose unceded traditional territories Simon Fraser University's three campuses reside. Graduate Studies is committed to taking concrete steps to uphold the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

SFU is home to over 125 graduate credentials, and more than 4,200 graduate students from over 110 countries are enrolled in academic units across our three campuses. SFU graduate students learn from and are supervised by world-class faculty members who make use of a range of methods to develop new knowledge, make important discoveries, and provide insights into some of our world's most pressing problems

Graduate students play a central role in fulfilling SFU's research and academic missions. It is therefore essential that the Graduate Studies strategic plan speak to the University's broad strategic priorities alongside its research and academic priorities and that it set an ambitious path for the future. As the hub for diverse students, faculty and staff associated with a range of credentials across SFU, Graduate Studies seeks to a) support academic units, graduate programs, staff, supervisors and students in the work they do; b) work with Faculties to ensure quality within programs; and c) ensure consistency in the graduate student experience.

The team in Graduate Studies is excited to think about how close, transparent, and meaningful collaboration will enable academic units, graduate programs, faculty and staff, graduate students, and supervisors to flourish and to have an impact well beyond SFU. We look forward to collaborating on the implementation of this plan!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mary Grantham O'Brien".

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



INTRODUCTION

Graduate Studies oversees the lifecycle of graduate students from initial inquiries to application, admission, registration and convocation. Key functions of GS include the following:

- admissions and recruitment support for applicants and academic units;
- oversight and development of scholarships, awards, and Graduate General Regulations;
- academic supports for students and supervisors;
- maintenance of student records;
- curricular supports including new program development;
- professional development and student experience support; and
- interdisciplinary graduate programming.

Graduate Studies is a highly collaborative unit that responds quickly to concerns. We provide training and resources and advocate for students, supervisors and academic units as they navigate the funding, research and curricular landscapes.

Graduate Studies supports [*inclusive excellence*](#) and is committed to delivering on the [*Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action*](#) and the recommendations of the [*SFU Aboriginal Reconciliation Council's Walk the Path with Us report*](#). The Associate Director, Indigenous Policy and Pedagogy offers individualized supports for Indigenous graduate students by providing guidance in the application, admission and convocation processes.

Graduate Studies also serves as the hub of support for interdisciplinary graduate programming through the Individualized Interdisciplinary Studies program.

OUR VISION, MISSION, VALUES

Starting in Fall 2023, Graduate Studies began a visioning process to set a shared path for the future. The work involved a series of workshops. The culmination of the collaborative work is a shared vision, mission and goals.

VISION

To be the hub of support for inclusive excellence¹ and equity in graduate education and research.

MISSION

We support and connect the SFU graduate community. Using an equitable approach to enhancing the graduate student journey, we honour each person's unique gifts as they pursue and share new skills and knowledge.



¹ Inclusive excellence integrates principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) to create environments where all individuals thrive and contribute effectively. Graduate Studies supports a culture dedicated to academic integrity and quality while also enacting, supporting, and encouraging proactive measures to identify and eliminate systemic barriers so that all members of the SFU community feel welcomed, respected, and valued, and have the opportunity to fully and authentically participate. Inclusive excellence also means fostering environments where diverse research methodologies and perspectives are not only acknowledged but are also recognized and valued. Graduate Studies appreciates that excellence looks different across disciplines and in the context of individual opportunities and circumstances. By fostering a culture of belonging and accountability and nurturing diverse perspectives, especially those from historically marginalized groups, inclusive excellence enhances community engagement, boosts academic success, and prepares individuals for global challenges, ultimately driving innovation and societal impact.



VALUES

RESOURCEFUL

We are a proactive and supportive unit. By using creative solutions, we adapt to the ever-changing graduate landscape.

COMMUNITY-MINDED

We identify and bridge the diversity of our graduate community toward shared goals.

COLLABORATIVE

We engage with partners to find common ground and develop balanced outcomes.

TRANSPARENT

We are open and honest in the work we do, building trust and accountability to create a positive work environment.

RESPECTFUL

Embracing a people-first approach, we work hard to support everyone with dignity and understanding.

CONTEXT AND UNIVERSITY PRIORITIES

SFU and Graduate Studies recognize the importance of graduate student contributions, regardless of whether they pursue a research or a professional program. Graduate students are embedded within the fabric of most university priorities, and this is evidenced by the university, research and academic strategic plans.



What's Next: The SFU Strategy lays out a vision to be “a leading research university, advancing an inclusive and sustainable future.” Graduate students, who inspire much of SFU’s innovative thinking and advance research, play a key role in achieving this vision. While a priority in *SFU’s Strategic Research Plan* focuses on supporting research graduate students, this includes, but is not limited to, the recent implementation of minimum funding for PhD students.

The development of this strategic plan for Graduate Studies was highly collaborative and, in addition to aligning with the values set forth in SFU’s strategic, research and academic plans, takes into consideration insights and feedback from individuals across SFU. It will guide the work in Graduate Studies between 2025 and 2030.

Graduate Studies supports *SFU’s Academic Plan*’s focus areas of program development and curriculum renewal; research excellence; Indigenization and decolonization; inclusive excellence and access; internationalization and global engagement; and institutional effectiveness.



DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PLAN

Data for this strategic plan were collected from key partners—supervisors, Graduate Program Chairs and Graduate Program Assistants, student caucuses, SFU leadership, and internal collaborators—between December 2023 and April 2024. The five key areas in which data were collected and organized include:

- meaningfully supporting all graduate students;
- strengthening graduate mentorship and supervision;
- promoting high-quality graduate academics and research;
- establishing a principled approach to curricular change and development; and
- evaluating the structure and role of Graduate Studies within SFU and beyond.

The plan that follows lays out key tasks in each of the priority areas and a timeline for completing those tasks and aligns each with SFU's strategic, research and academic plans.

We look forward to working with partners across the university and beyond to ensure that graduate education at SFU is forward-looking, responsive, collaborative and supportive of inclusive excellence.



PRIORITY AREAS

Graduate Studies		Timeline						Alignment with SFU Strategies		
Strategy	Action	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	<u>What's Next</u>	<u>Strategic Research Plan</u>	<u>Academic Plan</u>
Priority Area 1: Meaningfully support all graduate students										
Enhance supports for graduate students	Offer regular PD workshops in collaboration with other units on campus	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Enhance supports for Indigenous graduate students	Explore funding supports for Indigenous graduate students; improve IGES competition process	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Establish and implement Welcoming Procedure for Indigenous graduate students	•	•					•	•	•
Support pedagogical development of graduate students	Offer pedagogical supports (e.g., workshops, pedagogy courses)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Explore and encourage more opportunities for graduate students to teach in their areas of expertise	•	•	•				•	•	•
Support professional graduate students	Review and update policies and procedures with the goal of supporting professional graduate programs	•	•	•	•			•		•
	Explore and support opportunities for increasing accessibility of professional graduate credentials	•	•	•	•			•		•
Support research graduate students	Establish and offer regular workshops to support high quality research; share external workshop opportunities with students	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Explore additional funding opportunities to support graduate student research	•	•	•	•			•	•	•
	Support the decolonization and Indigenization of research practices and presentations, supervision and defenses (e.g., workshops, symposia, explore integration of ceremony)	•	•	•				•	•	•
	Explore common milestones for graduate students		•	•	•			•	•	•
	Explore and support alternative thesis models	•	•					•		•
Enhance support for the retention of graduate students	Provide additional supports for the Graduate Progress Report	•	•	•	•			•		•
	Create and implement a follow-up orientation program for graduate students in years 2+	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Provide opportunities for graduate students to better connect with SFU services and professional development opportunities	•	•	•				•	•	•
Build stronger connections with units across SFU	Build stronger connections through regular visits to academic units at all 3 campuses	•	•	•	•	•	•			•

Graduate Studies		Timeline						Alignment with SFU Strategies		
Strategy	Action	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	<u>What's Next</u>	<u>Strategic Research Plan</u>	<u>Academic Plan</u>
Support decolonization and integration of inclusive excellence into the work of Graduate Studies	Provide regular opportunities for professional development for staff	●	●	●	●	●	●			●
Create and connect faculty and staff to the knowledge, funding and tools needed to successfully support graduate student enterprise	Improve and actively collaborate to ensure clarity in Faculty & Staff Resources (communication, webpages and training opportunities)	●	●					●		●
	Collaborate with units to investigate possible changes to Base Allocation Student Support (BASS) funding model, to ensure an equitable approach to funding	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●
Streamline and clarify Graduate Studies processes	Review data collection and retention procedures from application to convocation, ensuring that appropriate data are collected and stored effectively	●	●	●				●	●	●
Improve graduate data collection, reporting and storage	Work with IT teams to obtain and store accurate, meaningful, and impactful data from sources within SFU	●	●	●	●	●		●		●
Priority Area 2: Strengthening graduate mentorship and supervision										
Establish standards for high-quality supervision	Collaborate on the development of supervisory regulations that empower programs to create program-specific policies within a broader framework	●	●	●				●	●	●
	Empower academic units to develop program-specific supervisory policies	●	●	●				●	●	●
Provide supports for high-quality supervision	Develop and implement student-supervisor agreement	●	●					●	●	●
	Develop and deliver supervisory workshops for supervisors at all stages of supervision and students at all points in their graduate career	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Establish and support a community of practice to enable connections among supervisors			●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Support the mentorship of graduate students	Provide training and workshops on supervision that align with BC commitments to UNDRIP to Indigenous students and their supervisors	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Provide training workshops on supervision that promote inclusive excellence	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Enhance support for the retention of graduate students	Create and implement a peer-to-peer mentorship program with graduate students as well as alumni		●	●	●	●	●	●		●

PRIORITY AREAS

Graduate Studies		Timeline						Alignment with SFU Strategies		
Strategy	Action	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	<u>What's Next</u>	<u>Strategic Research Plan</u>	<u>Academic Plan</u>
Priority Area 3: Promoting high-quality graduate academics and research										
Improve Graduate Studies and academic unit collaboration on recruitment	Collaborate with academic units and communicators to improve recruitment strategies	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
	Enhance strategies and tools for recruitment and retention of graduate students from diverse backgrounds	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Collaborate with the VPRI office to publicize which supervisors are looking for graduate students	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Increase awareness, understanding, and success of various pathways to graduate admission and research	Promote the Accelerated Master's and other pathways into graduate education	•	•	•				•	•	•
Increase student success in obtaining external awards	Improve, promote and support external funding (award) resources and applications (e.g., through workshops and mentorship)	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•
Differentiate among master's pathways	Explore options for clearer delineation among master's program types	•	•					•	•	•
	Simplify fee structures for master's programs	•	•	•	•					•
	Explore funding options for master's students	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Ensure alignment with best practices for promoting high-quality academics and research	Regularly consult with and obtain feedback from advisory bodies	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Support the safe and equitable adoption of new research tools and research dissemination	•	•	•				•	•	•
Policy review	Ensure that policies are in alignment with principles of Truth and Reconciliation		•	•	•			•		•
	Ensure that policies support inclusive excellence and ensure equitable outcomes		•	•	•			•		•
	Differentiate among policies as they apply to different types of student programs		•	•	•			•		•
Increase recruitment of high-quality graduate students	Improve online tools for streamlined admission funding offers	•	•					•	•	•
	Explore options for holistic admissions		•	•	•			•	•	•
Increase accessibility of graduate student funding	Implement a funding portal	•	•					•	•	•
	Re-platform the existing scholarship system with an easy-to-use alternative	•	•	•				•	•	•
	Review all scholarship processes and eligibility to support inclusive excellence	•	•	•				•		•

Graduate Studies		Timeline						Alignment with SFU Strategies		
Strategy	Action	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	<u>What's Next</u>	<u>Strategic Research Plan</u>	<u>Academic Plan</u>
Priority Area 4: Establish a principled approach to curricular change and development										
Improve clarity around processes and develop stronger supports for academic units working on pathways into graduate programs, curricular changes and development	Ensure common terminology and encourage a university-wide approach to course units and program learning outcomes	•	•	•						•
	Clarify policies and procedures and training around the Accelerated Master's pathway, the development of ladder pathways, and qualifying versus conditional admission	•	•					•		•
	Revise program proposal templates to include program outcomes and to enable supports for inclusive excellence and Truth and Reconciliation as outlined in SFU's Academic Plan	•	•							•
	Update and streamline the tools and resources available to support and clarify curriculum processes (e.g., web resources)		•	•						•
	Migrate to the new SharePoint and leverage technology to support the process of curriculum review and approval	•	•	•				•		•
Support professional development co-curricular Activities	Develop and implement a centralized internship program				•	•	•	•	•	•
Priority Area 5: Evaluate the structure and role of Graduate Studies within SFU and beyond										
Propose a meaningful structural and governance model for Graduate Studies	Explore the establishment of a Faculty of Graduate Studies	•	•					•	•	•
	Explore and establish a collegial governance model for Graduate Studies that ensures greater participation in decision making	•	•	•				•	•	•
	Explore and understand how the work of Graduate Studies interacts with other units in SFU and beyond	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Digitize and modernize workflows and an IT solution to better support students, supervisors and academic units	•	•	•				•	•	•
	Recruit a records coordinator to facilitate workflows, systems, and policies		•	•				•	•	•
Improve understanding of who Graduate Studies is, what Graduate Studies does, and how Graduate Studies contributes to SFU and beyond	Create and implement a communications strategy for the Graduate Studies brand and highlight impact.		•	•	•	•		•	•	•
Support graduate programs	Develop handbooks for GPCs and GPAs	•	•					•	•	•
	Establish and deliver workshops for GPCs and GPAs	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•



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