FIVE-YEAR ACADEMIC PLAN
2019—2024

PROGRESS UPDATE
2023

SFU
Academic Plan 2019-24: Progress Update 2023

TRANSITION TO THE FUTURE: This 2019-24 academic plan was designed to ensure that SFU took the necessary steps to be the university it wanted to be in 2024 and beyond. The university set out in 2019 wanting to provide exceptional and distinctive academic programming and an outstanding student experience, to continue to grow its world-class scholarship and creativity, to advance its mutually beneficial relationships with the community, and to contribute to social infrastructure for a better world. This institutional-level academic plan was co-created with the SFU community, building on the academic plans that faculties and their academic units had prepared, as well as other strategic plans, and aligning with SFU’s vision. As SFU worked its way through COVID-19 and the challenges that accompanied it, the university remained committed to the fundamental core of the academic plan, but the plan itself, like so many things, had to adapt to the changing landscape.

What’s Next: The SFU Strategy

In 2023, after an extensive community consultation, a new leadership team, led by a new president, released What’s Next: The SFU Strategy. This is a plan for where SFU is going next—and how it plans to get there. It begins with a vision of who SFU aspires to be: SFU is a leading research university, advancing an inclusive and sustainable future. It describes the SFU everyone knows and the SFU the university knows it can be. It represents a shift in the university’s planning ecosystem to converge upon a more streamlined and coordinated set of plans, including the academic and strategic research plans, each of which explicitly supports and is supported by the institutional strategy. This academic plan was implemented before What’s Next, but was built upon the principles and foundations that have always been at the heart of SFU and of which gave birth to its What’s Next: The SFU Strategy.
Purpose of this Progress Update

For the past five years, SFU has been committed to fulfilling the challenges and goals of the academic plan. Through focused planning and preparations, the university has implemented many initiatives and endeavours that have both complemented and fulfilled the overarching vision of the plan. The purpose of this Progress Update is to give specific examples that showcase SFU’s commitment to its academic plan and its overall vision.

The Five Challenges

The plan focused on five equally important challenges:

- Student Life, Learning, and Success
- Academic Quality/Curriculum
- Engagement
- Bridging Divides/Interdisciplinarity
- Faculty Renewal

The following pages offer a non-exhaustive sample of academic plan-related achievements made over the past five years. The sample is presented in alphabetical order within each of the five challenges.
Challenge: Student Life, Learning, and Success

Enhance support and physical and virtual environments to make the student experience at SFU the best it can be.

SFU is committed to enhancing the services, programs, opportunities, and environments that optimize student learning and success. Students’ overall well-being is paramount to this commitment. To that end, SFU has been committed to developing initiatives, programs, and services across all three campuses to support its students’ mental health and well-being.

Faculty of Environment

The Faculty of Environment has developed an EnvironMentors program that provides a friendly “big brother/big sister” go-to person for students seeking information and resources. The mentors send out a monthly email to new Faculty of Environment students throughout their first year. A template is crafted by the Dean’s office to capture key points/resources, which are then personalized by each mentor. The goal of the program is to ease the transition into first year for new students and to help provide them with the tools for success.

Faculty of Health Sciences

The Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) created and opened an FHS Student Commons that enables both group and individual study, creates spaces for collaborative work and presentations, and houses the faculty’s two student organizations. The goal of the commons is to help build a community and sense of belonging, improve overall communications with students and between students, and to create a home away from home for all Faculty of Health Sciences students.

Student Services

My SSP (student support program) is a resource designed to support the overall mental health and well-being of students by providing real-time 24/7 access to professional counsellors as well as scheduled short-term counselling support. Students utilize the My SSP app to connect with live support and to review its extensive library of digital emotional health and well-being content, which includes access to virtual fitness sessions and self-administered assessments.
Student Services

SFU Student Services has put a Housing Master Plan into place. This four-phase plan started with the 2021 completion of 90 units for graduate students and students who parent. Phase 2 student housing, which opened in 2023, is inclusive of 369 beds for first and second-year undergraduate students, an Indigenous community gathering space, departmental office space, and the Simon Short Stay accommodation suites. The Phase 3 (and soon Phase 4) residence building plans are in place for 445 upper year undergraduate and graduate student beds. With this Housing Master Plan, SFU is not only providing more room to house students, but it is also providing more amenities and common spaces for students to grow, develop, and get the most of their time at the university.

Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Learning and Teaching

A vice-provost and associate vice-president, learning and teaching-led review of the Indigenous University Preparation Pathway (IUPP) initiative is leading to incremental changes in admissions, advising, and wrap-around student support. The new model includes new, dedicated positions in the Indigenous Student Centre and in Indigenous recruiting and admissions, and a re-think of the cohort model (students will now have some choice of which courses to take to further their personal goals in the second term of the two-term cohort pathway).

The pathway offers first-year academic credit courses that integrate various disciplines with Indigenous perspectives. The goal of the IUPP is to help Indigenous learners prepare and transition into undergraduate studies at SFU.
Challenge: Academic Quality/Curriculum

Take a hard look at today’s curriculum and associated practices to ensure that they are meaningful, easy to navigate, and that they meet SFU’s diverse student needs for today and tomorrow.

As a comprehensive research university that respects and values diversity, SFU’s academic units have been planning and reviewing their programs with regard to their disciplinary standards, evolving knowledge bases, and pedagogical strengths while supporting new program development in areas of demand and curricular relevance.

Faculty of Applied Sciences

As a society we are becoming more aware of the urgent need for sustainable energy solutions and these can only be realized if we provide people with the education and experience to become leaders in the field. This is the impetus behind the Faculty of Applied Sciences creation of bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral programs in Sustainable Energy Engineering. These degrees are designed to provide students with advanced theoretical and applied technical knowledge in the field to help solve some of society’s pressing need for new and clean energy sources.

Faculty of Arts and Applied Sciences

The Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Languages and Linguistics offers training to students for careers as language researchers, post-secondary educators, and material developers. Students gain expertise in communicative skills, language documentation and analysis of a particular Indigenous language. Some cohorts will be entirely devoted to a single language (e.g. Hul’q’umi’num’), while others will be mixed-language cohorts focusing on work by individual students or groups of students on a particular language, but supplemented by material applicable to all the languages of the cohort (e.g. Xaad Kil, Secwepemctsín, and Tahl’tan).
Faculty of Science

The Faculty of Science created an **Infection and Immunity concentration** in Molecular Biology and Biochemistry that reflects the pandemic-related increase in interest infectious disease.

Library

The SFU Library’s **Indigenous Curriculum Resource Centre**, online and in the Bennett Library, supports decolonizing and Indigenizing curriculum across all disciplines at SFU. The centre was developed in direct response to Call to Action 21 in the 2017 SFU Aboriginal Reconciliation Council’s report, *Walk This Path with Us*, and now serves as a starting place for instructors updating courses in response to the university’s commitments to reconciliation and decolonization.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Learning launched a renewed **Human Resources Management Certificate program**, which is accredited with the Chartered Professionals in Human Resources (CPHR), British Columbia and Yukon (2022). It provides specialized training for students wishing to excel as human resource professionals. This part-time, online program was created and renewed in response to emerging demands for flexible training for this growing professional field.

Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Learning and Teaching

At SFU, educational goals for programs were introduced beginning in 2013 as part of the external review cycle for academic departments, a process that has been recently improved by involving the associate vice-president, learning and teaching (AVPLT) and the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Teaching and Learning (SCUTL). In 2022, SFU adopted institutional-level educational goals for all undergraduate students, based on the recommendations of a 2018 working group and revisions made by SCUTL. The university is currently working toward the adoption of course-level educational goals. Educational goals not only set out clear expectations for all students, but they help the university in all areas of institution, program, and course assessment. The AVPLT has a web page dedicated to **educational goals at SFU**.
Further the connections between the institution and the broader community, with dialogue, outreach, and learning as priorities.

SFU understands the critical importance of interacting with the world around it. The pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and engagement to address global challenges is core to SFU’s vision and is reflected in the activities that have arisen from the academic plan.

**Vice-President, Research and International**

Designed around a collaborative research infrastructure, SFU’s [Community-Engaged Research Initiative](#) (CERi) promotes principles of participation, cooperation, social transformation, and knowledge translation to lift and strengthen the capacity of SFU’s researchers and students to engage respectfully and ethically with community organizations, Indigenous Nations, community members, and leadership, including cultural leaders. It allows SFU researchers and students to develop meaningful and productive research partnerships that are capable of strengthening relationships between universities, nations, and organizations.

**Beedie School of Business**

Open to all SFU Beedie students, as well as incoming exchange students, the [Beedie Abroad Network](#) (BAN) provides social and cultural programming, academic mentorship, and greater connections to the study abroad community. BAN connects current SFU Business students with exchange students from SFU Beedie’s international academic partners and leverages the student experience to promote international opportunities to the SFU Beedie community.

**Faculty of Applied Sciences**

The Faculty of Applied Sciences opened a [Smart Manufacturing Hub](#) that will help revolutionize traditional manufacturing processes, provide space for innovation and collaboration with industry and train the next generation of the industry’s workforce. Housed at the Surrey Campus, the space is the first-of-its-kind in Western Canada. It comes equipped with a state-of-the-art Industry 4.0 training system that simulates a highly automated smart factory and is embedded with artificial vision, collaborative robots, smart devices, and more.
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) has created a Reconciliation Working Group (RWG) comprised of seven FASS faculty, students, and staff and is co-chaired by Tim Michel, Director, Indigenous Relations and Kate Slaney, Associate Dean, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. The RWG has developed the Reconciling Curriculum Grant Program as part of FASS’ ongoing commitment to reconciliation. These grants are intended to support both small- and large-scale initiatives to indigenize FASS curricula, as well as support cultural awareness training, professional development, and assist in strengthening partnerships with Indigenous Knowledge-holders in the community.

Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

The Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology (FCAT) partnered with 5X Festival in the celebration of South Asian arts and culture. As part of this collaboration, 5X Festival and FCAT hosted a panel of journalists and scholars to discuss representation in media. Youth, aged 16-35, heard about the pressures of being “the only one” representing a given community and how that narrative is changing.

Faculty of Education

The Faculty of Education's Teacher Education programs are committed to addressing the major issue of teacher recruitment and retention in rural and remote communities by engaging with district partners to provide locally-based preservice teacher education programs as well as online and in-person professional development for in-service teachers in rural and northern regions of the province. Teacher Education programs partner with Northern Lights College, the Peace River South school district, the Peace River North school district, and the Fort Nelson school district to prepare teachers in British Columbia's Peace Region for local employment. In 2020, SFU offered a teacher education program pilot in Prince Rupert, BC. Teacher Education programs continue to seek new and innovative ways of offering programming that meets the needs of both local and more geographically remote communities in BC.
Faculty of Science

The Faculty of Science has developed grade-specific virtual science activities and workshops to support science education in the British Columbia K-12 school system. The virtual activities are used by both classroom teachers and home-schooled children, while the hands-on workshops are hosted on the Burnaby campus and run by a group of SFU science volunteers. Both of these initiatives have proven to be successful and will be maintained and further developed as a result. K-12 Resources - Faculty of Science - Simon Fraser University (sfu.ca)

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Learning's Community Capacity Building (CCB) program has very successfully built connection, confidence, and employability in its learners. The program has an over 90% graduation rate and its learners have attracted close to $1m in funding for their projects.

- Lifelong Learning received two B.C. Community Workforce Response Grants to support Community Capacity Building Certificate program participants (these grants also aided funding another program that helped unemployed and precariously employed participants to learn business fundamentals and communication skills).
- Lifelong Learning ran the Community Capacity Building Certificate program at no cost to learners and saw program participants and alumni secure more than $800,000 in additional funding (from various sources) for their projects.

Student Services

SFU’s Student Services is committed to increasing engagement with the university’s Indigenous student population. It recently added a counsellor and Indigenous student life coordinator to the Indigenous Student Centre at the Surrey campus, as well as it renovated and opened new spaces for Indigenous students at all three SFU campuses.
Challenge: Bridging Divides/Interdisciplinarity

Remove barriers and create an environment that supports collaboration across disciplines and administrative boundaries.

Collaboration is an important underlying element of SFU’s vision. SFU feels it is essential to connect with academic and industry professionals across the globe. These connections help to drive and enhance advanced research and innovation. SFU currently has dual degrees and partnerships in place with many national and international institutions, professional associations, and companies. Furthermore, SFU continues to expand its close collaborative working relationships with BC post-secondary institutions and local school districts.

Beedie School of Business/Faculty of Environment

Sustainable Business is a joint major designed for students who are interested in careers in the private, non-profit or public sector in areas such as green entrepreneurship and innovation, supply chain management, environmental impact assessment and mitigation, energy and materials management, and management within resource and environmental companies. Students who enroll in the program may opt for either a Bachelor of Environment (BENV) from the Faculty of Environment or a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) from the Beedie School of Business.

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

The Social Data Analytics (SDA) Minor in the Faculty of Arts is the only degree program of its kind in Canada to provide the skills to effectively navigate, analyze, and communicate “big data” in the social science context. The program provides students with a foundation in computational and statistical methods with an emphasis on the privacy, ethical, and societal issues surrounding technology and big data. Courses are taken in economics, philosophy, linguistics and political science, and from the amalgamation of these discipline’s perspectives, students learn to collect, analyze, and critically evaluate the large volume of digitized, real-world data derived from and related to human behaviour. They learn to communicate data-driven insights to the public, scholarly community, and policymakers, and they will do so while respecting and upholding the privacy and ethical concerns that have emerged in the big data era.
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Each year since 2014, undergraduates from SFU’s World Literature Program have hosted the World Literature Student Conference, an interdisciplinary academic student conference addressing cultural, social, and aesthetic frames of reference. Panels range across topics encompassing literature, cinema, and the image and investigate the socio-political, cultural, and literary fallout of cross-national encounters. Each conference has been attended by nearly 200 students, faculty, and members of the public. Addressing a shared conference theme, each year some 24-30 undergraduates from different departments present papers across four focused conference panels on aspects of world literature and global culture. The conference is organized by the World Literature Student Union.

Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

The Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology (FCAT) holds its annual Undergraduate and Graduate Conference (UGC) each year. FCAT’s UGC is a celebration and exploration of the diverse range of student work produced within the faculty. Students from each of the schools and programs in FCAT have the opportunity to showcase performances, papers, installations, and displays. At the 2023 UGC there were over 110 students presenting 53 projects from the School of Communications, School of Interactive Arts and Technology, School for the Contemporary Arts, and the Publishing program. FCAT had the pleasure of hosting over 200 students, faculty, staff, friends, alumni, and community members at this interdisciplinary event of inspiring student work.

Library

The Digital Humanities Innovation Lab (DHIL) in the SFU Library serves as a hub for digital humanities activity at SFU. Bringing together students, faculty, librarians, web developers, and graduate fellows, it provides consultation, training, mentoring, research software development, and technical support. Projects come from varied departments across SFU, including English, Philosophy, Computing Science, Interactive Arts and Technology, Communication, and History. Located in the W.A.C. Bennett Library at SFU Burnaby and utilizing meeting space at the Vancouver and Surrey campuses, the DHIL leverages the Library’s expertise in digital initiatives, unique special collections, and research skill-development programming.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Learning has advanced Indigenous inclusion, decolonization, and reconciliation by incorporating a Circles of Learning and Unlearning group—including members with lived experience—into program and operational planning. Lifelong Learning is committed to establishing an authentic Indigenous voice, not only into its program offerings, but into its overall learning culture, as it strives to deliver leading-edge programming to meet the needs and curiosities of learners throughout their lifespans.
Challenge: Faculty Renewal

Recruit and hire the best faculty and staff while supporting SFU’s equity and diversity objectives and addressing career incentives to support existing and future priorities.

SFU recognizes the imperative need to recruit and retain excellent faculty and staff and is committed to recruiting professionals who share in the philosophy of its vision. Furthermore, recruitment, hiring, and career incentives must anticipate and address the needs and priorities of tomorrow as well as advance SFU’s equity and diversity objectives.

Faculty of Environment

The Faculty of Environment hired a new Indigenous faculty member for its Environmental Planning and Governance position in the School of Resource and Environmental Management (REM). The faculty also hired four professors for the growing School of Environmental Sciences in the past three years. The Geography department welcomed five new human geographer and two physical geography professors during this same time frame, three of which are from equity-deserving groups. And finally, the Archaeology department has been blessed to attract a prominent Indigenous professor who focuses on West Coast Indigenous archaeology.

Faculty of Health Sciences

The Faculty of Health Sciences strengthened its mentorship program and support for new faculty by assigning formal mentors to pre-tenure faculty and by reaching out to new faculty at the start of their appointments to ask about teaching and course/term preferences. The faculty continues to provide human resources supports and regular workshops for new faculty as well as university research associates and limited term instructors. The goal is to foster a sense of community and an internal culture that encourages participation and respects diversity.
Faculty of Science

The Faculty of Science is the first academic faculty to appoint an Associate Dean of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion to ensure its culture and practices are respectful and inclusive of all faculty, students, and staff.

SFU’s Response to the Scarborough Charter

In 2021, SFU was among almost 50 post-secondary institutions that signed the Scarborough Charter, pledging to fight anti-Black racism and encourage Black inclusion in higher education in Canada.

In June 2023, the B.C. Human Rights Commissioner approved two Special Program applications, allowing SFU to conduct limited and preferential hiring of at least 15 tenure-track Black faculty as well as 15 Black staff members. These appointments will showcase SFU’s commitment to not only the Scarborough Charter but to its own Equity Compass, which focuses on the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion in the SFU community.
Self Discovery

Simon Fraser University engages in ongoing, participatory, purposeful, systematic, integrated, and comprehensive planning. The 2019-24 Academic Plan was aligned with SFU’s vision/mission, its objectives, and the identified goals or intended outcomes of its programs and services. The plan reflected the interdependent nature of SFU’s operations, functions, and resources in achieving intended academic goals.

During the five-year term of the plan, the university dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic, learning that its academic infrastructure was robust enough to withstand a sudden shift to online learning and then back again at the end of the pandemic. SFU instructors met this challenge with innovation and compassion. They delivered live online zoom lectures (recorded for later watching) and recorded videos and podcasts. To increase student engagement, they created small group discussion opportunities, online discussions, and invited students to form their own chat groups in WhatsApp or Facebook. Instructors created flexible due dates, shifted to take home exams, and allowed students to choose how to weight assignments. Essentially, SFU tackled the pandemic head on and emerged a stronger and more flexible institution because of it.

The institution learned the importance of subscribing to educational goals and their ability to provide a foundational base that serves student and public accountability. SFU further discovered that its programming is creative, respectful of Indigenous peoples and other minorities, and serves the local, national, and international communities in meaningful ways as evidenced by the various engaging initiatives highlighted in this Progress Update.

SFU is a university committed to its evolution and growth as a bastion of higher education. The academic plan has supported the university’s drive to engage, reflect upon, and improve the local, national, and international communities it serves. Recent years have been difficult. COVID-19, a problematic economic landscape, and many other issues have brought new and complex challenges to SFU. Throughout all such challenges, SFU has learned to find new ways to plan, adapt, and look toward the future with optimism and flexibility leading the way as it continues to achieve its vision/mission while providing an environment that promotes student success and achievement.
Looking to the Future

As evidenced in this Progress Update, steady progress was made across the five challenges identified in the academic plan. Some of the initiatives showcased have been in place for some time, while others are either new or just getting established, but all are contributing to meeting and addressing the challenges of the academic plan.

As SFU looks toward the future and the ever-changing landscape that education exists in, it will be looking to build upon this academic plan and the initiatives that were born from it. What's Next: the SFU Strategy will be at the forefront of university planning as SFU develops an academic plan for the next five years that enhances and furthers the university's commitment to its students, faculty, staff, and the local, national, and international communities it serves. Looking into the future, there is a push to have major plans united under one institutional planning umbrella. The belief is that this is the most effective way for university planning to serve the What's Next Strategy and the university community as a whole.