



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
ENGAGING THE WORLD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Senate of Simon Fraser University held on
Monday, December 4, 2023 at 5:30 pm at the West Mall Complex (Room 3210)
and via Zoom Video Conferencing

Open Session

Present: Joy Johnson, Chair

Abu-Samhan, Mishael
Barlow, Leanne
Bird, Gwen
Brennand, Tracy
Bullock, Cécile
Chapman, Glenn
Collard, Mark
Denholm, Julia
Eftenaru, Cristina
Everton, Mike
Faris, Reema
Fiume, Eugene
Gray, Bonnie
Hall, Peter
Hendrigan, Holly
Herrenbrueck, Lucas
Karaivanov, Alexander
Kayande, Ujwal
Kerr, Jeannie
Krogman, Naomi
Laitsch, Dan
Leznoff, Daniel
Liu, Connie
Lysova, Alexandra
Martell, Matt
Masri, Kamal
McKenzie, Janis
Muntean, Reese
Myers, Gord
Nelson, Todd
Neustaedter, Carman
O'Brien, Mary
O'Neil, Dugan
Pantophlet, Ralph
Parent, Michael
Percival, Colin
Pratt, Elspeth
Rassier, Dilson
Rincon, Laura

Schiphorst, Thecla
Schmidt, Michèle
Singh Walia, Harkirat
Stockie, John
Sutherland, Jill
Szymczyk, Barbara
Thornton, Allen
Tucker, Rochelle
Vuong, Quang
Weldon, Laurel
Williams, Vance

Absent:

Bhalloo, Shafik
Brooks-Wilson, Angela
Bubela, Tania
Dhesa, Priyanka
D'Silva, Tyler
Fisher, Brian
Fung, Aaron
Hodaly, Alexander
Kessler, Anke
Magnusson, Kris
Manzer, Mussaab
Nahmiash, Amanda
Parmar, Abhishek
Sawan, Amani
Shinkar, Igor
Traversa, Marissa
Vrooman, Tamara
Whitehurst, David
Williams, JF
Zuluaga, Natalia

In Attendance:

Racine, Timothy

1. Approval of the Agenda

The agenda was approved as distributed.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the Open Session of November 6, 2023

The minutes of the open session on November 6, 2023 were approved as distributed.

3. Business Arising from the Minutes

- i) At the November meeting, Senator Percival asked a question regarding the rationale behind MATH 232 no longer being a requirement for the Computing Science Dual Degree Program Major.

Eugene Fiume, Dean – Faculty of Applied Sciences, responded to this question.

Senate was informed that there was an oversight in the definition of the dual degree major. There are two linear algebra courses offered to students majoring in Computing Science - Math 232 and Math 240. The goal is to allow the dual degree program participants the same option of choosing one of the two possible linear algebra courses.

4. Report of the Chair

The Chair reported that after the previous Senate meeting, she, in her role as President, flew to East Africa to meet with partners at Aga Khan University (AKU) and at the Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology. Thanks was extended to Naomi Krogman, Dean of the Faculty of Environment, who also joined the trip. SFU is a founding partner of the Arusha Climate and Environmental Research Centre with AKU, and more than 1500 hectares in Tanzania that have been allocated for this facility. The Chair also met with SFU students participating in the inaugural field school at the reserve, studying the impacts of climate change as they relate to a rural setting.

The Chair reported that on the way back from Africa, she stopped in Waterloo to attend the Royal Society of Canada's annual Celebration of Excellence and Engagement, to celebrate SFU researchers who have been named to the Royal Society and also to announce that SFU will be hosting this event in 2024 - themed around community-centered climate innovation.

The Chair reported that SFU continues to face budget challenges, and as result, has initiated a hiring freeze. The University is facing immediate budget pressure in the current year and it is expected that this pressure will rise to approximately \$50 million over the next year. Next year's budget issues are a continuation of some of the current year's pressures, namely lower-than-expected international enrollment, inflationary and unfunded cost pressures, and unanticipated pension plan expense. Thanks was extended to Dilson Rassier, Provost and Vice-President, Academic, who has stepped into a role as Chief Budget Officer to ensure all decisions are being made through an academic lens.

i) Report of the Provost

The Provost reported the following updates on SFU's budget challenges:

- For the current fiscal year, SFU is facing about a \$12.5 million shortfall on international student enrollment revenue.
- As a result, a hiring freeze has been put in place and cuts have been imposed on some portfolios.
- For the upcoming fiscal year, SFU is expected to have a negative variance of about \$36 million.
- When combined, that approximates a net estimated deficit of about \$50 million.
- One of the main causes of this variance, besides lower international enrollment, is due to the divestment of about \$20 million of investments, notably in oil companies. That deficit is unrealized, meaning it could potentially be reversed depending on the market, but a loss of about \$20 million is predicted.
- Another factor for the variance is the need to contribute about \$9 million to the staff pension plan, which was not budgeted for in previous years.
- A further factor is SFU's commitment to be a living-wage employer. The budget line for that has increased more than predicted over the past few years, creating an extra budget pressure of about \$4 million.

A question was asked as to how these deficits will affect students this year and in the coming years. Senate was informed that given the seriousness of the budget deficits, students may feel indirect pressures, but that the University does not plan on cutting any direct lines supporting students, including not making cuts to scholarships or bursaries.

A question was asked about efforts to lobby the government given the current budget shortfall. Senate was informed that even before the deficit announcements, SFU met with the government to stress that universities need revenues beyond the reliance on international student enrollment. It is unknown if such efforts will prove effective, but SFU is in frequent contact with the government.

Noting the hiring freeze, a question was asked as to why certain new positions are still be created. Senate was informed that the hiring freeze, which does not impact the hiring of faculty or teaching assistants, is focused on administrative and support staff given the significant growth of these positions over the past number of years in comparison to faculty hiring. It was noted, however, that there is a hiring freeze exception approval process in place for positions deemed essential to the functioning of the faculties or administrative departments. Such exceptions may include positions deemed strategically important to the University.

5. Question Period

i) Senator Martell submitted the following questions:

The Pass/Fail deadline for students to take a P/F/NC is set for January 12. The makeup exam period takes place until Friday, January 5. For instructors to mark and enter the grade change request can be done in a day or two, but that request may not be approved at the department level until Monday or Tuesday and another day or two for SIMS to be updated.

Will Students have enough time to make a decision?

What happens if the grade change is not processed until after the deadline?

If any of these are a concern, should the date be extended until following week?

Peter Hall, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Academic, responded to this question.

Senate was informed that a mechanism is in place, but that the deadline will not be shifted. If a student has a DE grade on their record when the deadline comes, they will have an opportunity to request exceptional permission to have a grade change and that grade change could include whether or not to take the percentage grade or the pass-fail grade, but it will be handled on an exceptional basis so that it doesn't delay the process for everyone else

ii) Senator Hendrigan submitted the following question:

I realize that SFU needs to cut its budget, and the process needs to be fair. On November 10th, the Provost announced a hiring freeze, but protected SFU's academic mission, and indicated hiring of "faculty, teaching assistants, sessional instructors, or research employees" would continue. However, SFU Library's student workers were not protected. I am puzzled why these positions were deemed "administrative" rather than academic, and I am writing to ask about the criteria used to classify student positions in the Library as administrative and not academic.

Every semester, SFU Library hires 44 students for an average of 9 hours a week each, across six library divisions: loans services in the three branches, Research Commons, Digitization Lab and Interlibrary Loans. They work in a wide variety of front-facing and back-end positions: as circulation assistants and book shelveers; they also scan print materials for students receiving accommodations through the Centre for Accessible Learning. Grad students are hired in the Research Commons helping the SFU community with their questions on qualitative research software and ARC GIS and how to realize their Digital Humanities projects. In my library, Fraser Library in Surrey, our student pool is integral to circulating and maintaining the large and heavily used equipment collection on behalf of the School of Interactive Arts and Technology.

I'm aware that Library administrators have requested exemptions to the hiring freeze; if these exemptions are not granted, the Library will cut services and hours at all three libraries. Surrey and Vancouver branches will reduce their opening hours, particularly when we are short-staffed, because students fill in when our circulation staff are sick or are away.

To circle back, can the University speak to the criteria which differentiates academic versus administrative positions, especially in light of the Library's large complement of student positions?

Dilson Rassier, Provost and Vice-President, Academic, responded to this question.

Senate was informed that the University is not suggesting that certain positions are unimportant or connected to the academic mission. Rather, SFU is trying to ensure that the exception process focuses on positions that are essential or that cannot be restructured within the current unit

structure. The nature of a hiring freeze necessitates that every exception not granted will lead to consequences for that unit, but it is hoped that the exception process will help ensure the continuance of essential positions.

6. Reports of Committees

A) Senate Committee on University Priorities (SCUP)

i) External Review for the Department of Psychology (S.23-139)

Moved by D. Rassier, seconded by V. Williams

“That Senate approve the Action Plan for the Department of Psychology that resulted from its external review.”

Timothy Racine, Professor and Chair – Department of Psychology, was in attendance to respond to questions.

The question was called and a vote taken.

MOTION CARRIED

ii) External Review for the School of Interactive Arts and Technology (S.23-140)

Moved by D. Rassier, seconded by M. Abu-Samhan

“That Senate approve the Action Plan for the School of Interactive Arts and Technology that resulted from its external review.”

A question was asked to elaborate on a line in the review stating that the undergraduate interdisciplinary curriculum *does not prepare students to be accepted and flourish in SIAT’s own graduate programs*. Senate was informed that SIAT’s undergraduate program maintains strong community practices with industry but does not have a strong history for bridging undergraduate students into its graduate program. Whereas the undergraduate program has a focus on design, the graduate program is heavily research oriented, featuring considerable interdisciplinarity. As such, graduate students tend to be technically astute, but lack a design background.

Citing current and future budget restrictions, a question was asked regarding how the university will support action plans where the recommendations have to do with facilities and spaces, given those are capital expenses. Senate was informed that given the budget situation, choices will have to be made, and that some items may not be addressed right away. It was added that SIAT is working under the premise that it must utilize the infrastructure it currently has, with potential upgrades being supported by the John R. Evans Leaders Fund (JELF).

A question was asked as to how the proposed graduate funding model (see S.23-147) will affect the action plan. Senate was informed that SIAT has been analyzing IRP data and its own funded data and found that the school is doing well based on the kinds of funding featured in its research programs. As such, SIAT has been looking at completion time and other internal strategies within the graduate program that can help students graduate more quickly.

The question was called and a vote taken.

MOTION CARRIED

iii) Suspension of Admission to the Geographic Information Systems Major and Honours (S.23-141)

Senate received Suspension of Admission to the Geographic Information Systems Major and Honours for information.

iv) Centres and Institutes Annual Reports (S.23-142)

Senate received Centres and Institutes Annual Reports for information.

v) Centres and Institutes Renewal Applications (S.23-143)

Senate received Centres and Institutes Renewal Applications for information.

B) Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies (SCUS)

i) Program Changes (S.23-144)

Senate received information that the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies, acting under delegated authority, approved program changes in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (Global Asia Program, Global Humanities, Labour Studies Program, Philosophy, World Languages and Literatures).

ii) New Course Proposals (S.23-145)

Senate received information that the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies, acting under delegated authority, approved new course proposals in the Faculty of Applied Sciences (School of Mechatronic Systems Engineering), and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies, History, School for International Studies, Labour Studies Program, World Languages and Literatures).

iii) Course Changes (S.23-146)

Senate received information that the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies, acting under delegated authority, approved course changes in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (Economics, Global Asia Program, Humanities, Linguistics, Philosophy, Sociology and Anthropology), and the Faculty of Science (Molecular Biology and Biochemistry, Physics).

C) Senate Graduate Studies Committee (SGSC)

i) New Graduate General Regulation (GGR) 1.17 - Minimum Funding (S.23-147 Revised)

Moved by M. O'Brien, seconded by V. Williams

"That Senate approve the new Graduate General Regulation 1.17 - Minimum Funding."

Citing the line on page one which states that *Based on program data from 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, it is evident that programs have the funds to provide this level of support*, a concern was raised that this statement does not match the data for TA funding with the faculty of Applied Sciences. Also, given the aforementioned budgetary challenges across the university, it is probable there will be a significant number of students which are not going to be supported. Based on this, and other concerns around funding, a motion to table S.23-147 was moved.

Motion:

Moved by G. Chapman, seconded by B. Gray

“That Senate table item S.23-147.”

Though a motion to table is not debatable, given that the questions and concerns around the data were raised before the motion to table was moved, it was agreed to allow the mover of the original motion a chance to respond.

Senate was informed that an analysis of all of the data around scholarship, RA and TA funding was run, with data from those findings being shared with every program across SFU.

The question was called and a vote taken to table item S.23-147.

MOTION FAILED

With the motion to table having failed, consideration turned back to the original motion.

A question was asked about the impact this policy will have on the winning of non-departmental scholarships and awards and the potential claw back a department might do to revise their funding to students once they win an award. Senate was informed that this policy asks programs to clearly lay out in their program level funding policies precisely how much they will reward the students on top of what is received from award funding. It was noted that programs can award the full \$28,000 on top of award funding, but that such consideration will not be possible for many programs. In such cases, Graduate Studies will work with programs to ensure that students are rewarded for their efforts to win major awards.

A question was asked to explain how much of a difference is \$28,000 compared to the funding currently being offered, and is consideration being given to having a domestic rate and an international rate. Senate was informed that in all but two programs, the median funding across a student's first four years is at least \$28,000. Currently, graduate students at SFU do not pay international tuition so consideration has not been given to implementing a split rate.

Though generally in support of the policy, it was suggested that it should be limited to three years, after which it must be reviewed. Further, a contingency fund should be created from which departments can request money in the event of miscalculations or other financial problems, given how difficult it is to predict financial variance on a year-by-year basis. Senate was informed that section 1.17.17 states that the policy must be reviewed and adjusted, at a minimum, every three years. Also, based on a recent meeting between the deans and the provost, there is a plan to put a contingency plan in place.

A comment was made that the consultation was at the faculty level, and not the departmental, and there was considerable variance across departments. The issue is not whether there should be a minimum funding, but rather does this policy fully serve the necessity of establishing a minimum funding. It was argued that the difficulty is that fiducial responsibility, as outlined in the policy, will handcuff programs, necessitating risk management and ultimately reducing the number of graduate students that can be accepted. Also, due to the variance across programs, a relatively quick review will need to be done to determine if the policy is working as intended.

A comment was made about providing more details on the plan to establish contingency funding, and a question was asked if the TSSU was consulted on this policy. Senate was informed that consultation with the TSSU was done through the Graduate Student Society (GSS), in which meetings were held with the GSS, at which TSSU members were present and provided feedback on the final policy.

Given the feedback and the level of concern expressed by faculty Senators, ahead of calling the question, the Chair noted that should the motion pass, the mover of the motion is being directed by Senate to report back to Senate in one year, and that more information on the contingency fund should be provided when available.

The question was called and a vote taken.

MOTION CARRIED

ii) Graduate General Regulation (GGR) Changes 1.3.3 - English Language Competence (S.23-148)

Moved by M. O'Brien, seconded by T. Schiphorst

“That Senate approve the revisions to Graduate General Regulation 1.3.3 English Language Competence, effective Summer 2024.”

The question was called and a vote taken.

MOTION CARRIED

iii) Program Changes (S.23-149)

Senate received information that the Senate Graduate Studies Committee, acting under delegated authority, approved program changes in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (English, Psychology).

iv) New Course Proposals (S.23-150)

Senate received information that the Senate Graduate Studies Committee, acting under delegated authority, approved new course proposals in the Faculty of Science (Mathematics).

v) Course Changes (S.23-151)

Senate received information that the Senate Graduate Studies Committee, acting under delegated authority, approved course changes in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (Psychology, School of Public Policy), the Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology (Centre for Digital Media), and the Faculty of Science (Physics).

vi) Course Deletions (S.23-152)

Senate received information that the Senate Graduate Studies Committee, acting under delegated authority, approved course deletions in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (School of Public Policy), and the Faculty of Science (Chemistry).

D) Senate Nominating Committee (SNC)

i) Senate Committee Elections (S.23-153)

Senate received a summary of the nominations, positions elected by acclamation, positions requiring an online vote, and outstanding vacancies for Senate committees.

7. Other Business

8. Information

i) Date of the next regular meeting – Monday, January 8, 2024

Open session adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

Tom Nault
Senate Secretary