

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
University Secretariat
MEMORANDUM

To: Senate
From: Alison Watt
Subject: President Stevenson's Agenda 2005-2009
Date: October 13, 2005

FOR INFORMATION

The Board of Governors approved the President's agenda at its meeting on September 29, 2005. This is forwarded to Senate for information and discussion at the November 7, 2005 meeting.



**SFU: RECREATING CANADA'S MOST EXCITING UNIVERSITY
THE PRESIDENT'S AGENDA 2005-2009**

**Michael Stevenson
June 2005**

(1) Introduction

This agenda follows my previous statement "SFU @ 40" written four years ago. That document summarized a number of priorities that have defined fundamental change in the intervening period.

Very significant new academic initiatives have been made over the last few years to realize my first agenda, the most notable of which have been:

- the establishment of the Surrey campus and the approval of the new School for Interactive Arts and Technology;
- the conclusion of the undergraduate curriculum review and approval of recommendations for far-reaching curriculum revisions to establish writing and quantitative skills as well as breadth requirements in every SFU degree programme;
- the establishment of a new Faculty of Health Sciences, approval of its first curriculum proposals and hiring authorization for the first of its graduate programmes in Population and Public Health;
- the establishment of new, interdisciplinary graduate programmes in public policy analysis, urban studies, and development studies;
- the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for internationalization, and the reorganization of administrative support for such plans through the establishment of SFU International.

Notable achievements in research include:

- continued leadership of the comprehensive universities in research, including ranking 4th amongst all Canadian research intensive universities in the humanities and social sciences, and 5th among all in science and engineering, for the number of competitively awarded grants per 100 faculty members;
- the award of major infrastructure grants from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation to support leading clusters of expertise at SFU in materials science, mathematics, computing and other areas;
- numerous individual awards to faculty and students, which continue SFU's tradition of out-ranking other institutions for the national and international recognition of scholarship.

Major changes in campus development include:

- a soon to be completed computer science building, and renovations enabling the occupancy by engineering science of the former applied sciences building;
- three new undergraduate residences linked to a new cafeteria facility in the student residence complex;
- approval for fit-out of the Surrey Campus and opening of the first two floors of that facility;

- completion early in the next academic year of the new Segal Graduate School for Business as part of the Vancouver campus;
- approval of projects to build a new science and applied science building, a new arts and social science building, a new health sciences building, and a new gymnasium and recreation facility;
- approval for the relocation of the School for Contemporary Arts as part of the Woodward's redevelopment in downtown Vancouver.

Major efforts have been made to diversify funding in support of the university. Tuition has been increased significantly across the board, and differential fees have been introduced in higher cost programmes, and for international students. These increases have allowed the university to manage declining per FTE grants without any compromise in quality, and to invest in infrastructural and other initiatives not funded by government. We have also made major strides towards realizing new fundraising targets which entail a four- to five-fold increase in endowments and other financial contributions to the university in the period 2000-05 as compared to the preceding five years. The Reaching New Heights campaign is in its final phase, and we are confident of realizing a \$125 million target by the end of the 40th anniversary year.

(2) Environmental Scan

The broad environmental pressures confronting the university remain essentially unchanged from the time I outlined my first agenda, although progress has been made on two fronts. Recent government action has substantially addressed the problems of demand for and accessibility to higher educational institutions in B.C. with the commitment to fund an additional 25,000 seats throughout the province. And the chronic facilities and infrastructure deficit faced at the beginning of the decade will be addressed to a large extent by projects to build academic and other facilities at SFU valued at close to \$400,000,000.00.

In both these areas, however, there remain important concerns. SFU, like the other BC universities, has yet to receive adequate grant funding for these new enrolment targets, and enrolment growth will compromise quality at current funding commitments. The infrastructure requirements have also not been fully met. Despite very significant government financing of key projects, government funding covers only about 75% of the space requirements previously agreed to as necessary for the match of academic facilities to enrolment targets. Further, we face unprecedented inflation in construction costs within the Lower Mainland. Again, therefore, absent future improvements in infrastructure funding, we cannot sustain quality.

Other pressures remain: intensifying national and international competition in higher education; the increasing necessity of diversified sources of funding; the increasing pressure for engagement with external communities, and the increasing demand for greater accountability to external stakeholders.

In these circumstances, our general objectives must remain: to establish

- the best liberal arts and science education in Canada;
- the most innovative interdisciplinary and professional programmes; and
- the most responsive engagement with the broader community.

It is clear however that these general objectives do not give sufficiently clear direction or motivation for change. For the next five years, I propose a series of more refined objectives relating to academic quality enhancement; greater attention to and recognition of the quality of student life; and an improved public profile.

(3) Academic Quality Enhancement

I believe there are four important dimensions in which our academic programmes should be improved.

First, we need to improve the mix of graduate student enrolment in our total activity. In my view we should aim to increase the proportion of our total enrolment in graduate programmes to 25% of total enrolment. The importance of graduate enrolment relates very much to the research mission of the university and to its competitive position in the distribution of funding for research. Over the past decade, there has been a sharper differentiation of higher educational institutions and an increasing advantage to more research intensive institutions as a result of changes in federal and to some extent provincial funding. No university can remain in the front ranks, as we aim to do, without sustaining a front-ranking position in research and research funding. No institution can do that without having front-ranking graduate programmes, and relatively high graduate student enrolment.

To achieve this objective, we must obtain government funding of graduate student enrolment, which has not been the case in BC since 1990. Further, we must expand financial assistance budgets for graduate students. Partly, this will be achieved by the expansion of our research activity which should follow from expanded faculty complements as a result of enrolment growth, and expanded graduate enrolment which adds to the research capacity and productivity of faculty. However, it is necessary to give strategic priority to private fundraising for graduate student assistance if we are to be truly competitive in this area.

Second, we must continue to increase the diversification of our programmes, increasing the number of professional and quasi-professional programmes, as well as creating new interdisciplinary specializations. In the restricted span of the next 4-5 years, we should concentrate on assuring that the new campus at Surrey, and the new Faculty of Health Sciences become home to as rich an array as possible of differentiated programmes. At the Vancouver campus we should continue to develop new applied and professional programmes, once we open up the new Segal Graduate School for Business. And on the mountain, we should attempt to create a stronger balance of science programmes and enrolment, reducing the relative size of enrolment in arts and social science, but allowing for greater selectivity and a greater weight of graduate enrolment and research in all programmes at our largest campus.

Third, we must successfully complete the undergraduate curriculum revisions now underway, thereby assuring higher quality undergraduate programmes across the board. These innovations in the establishment of written communications, quantitative reasoning and breadth requirements should be closely monitored, with data on successful implementation widely publicized. In addition, we should dramatically extend the scope of the Semester in Dialogue programme. This experiment in undergraduate education has proved very effective in

developing cohort bonding, service learning, team work and lateral thinking across disciplinary boundaries. It deserves to be expanded to accommodate a significantly greater number of students in their final year. A capstone course like this should become a distinguishing feature of the SFU undergraduate experience.

Fourth, we should continue the expansion of international enrolment and programmes, especially in partnership with front-ranking international institutions. In this light, we should expand the development of joint degree programmes on the model of the SFU-Zhejiang degree in Computer Science. Such programmes can become a defining mark of the distinctive academic experience offered at SFU. More generally, a stronger mix of international enrolment enhances the quality of the learning environment for domestic students, and, as importantly, it allows an independent source of funding for expanding teaching and research complements as well as infrastructure. International enrolment targets should move from 10% to 15% of total enrolment.

(4) Student Life

No university can claim a place amongst the leading institutions of the world without guaranteeing students a unique social as well as educational experience. In my view there are a number of areas that require attention.

We must resolve the problems of undergraduate course availability. There remain far too many students who indicate they cannot get the courses they wish to take, or worse, the courses they must take to complete degree programmes. Close attention must be paid by departmental and faculty administrators to obtaining the necessary information on course demand in excess of spaces provided in any semester, and assuring that adjustments are made to subsequent course offerings and scheduling.

We must meet the targets of the strategic plan for internationalization, assuring that students have richer contact with international students at SFU, and that they obtain an international experience themselves through exchange or field school programmes. In the contemporary world, a high quality undergraduate student experience demands an international component.

We must improve the quality of student services at SFU. This will require optimizing the capacities of the new student information system and of other web-based communication with students. It will also however require improved counselling and support for student life, and we need to research the benchmark capacities in such areas of our leading competitors before creating clear and achievable targets for improvement at SFU.

We must invest in improved extra-curricular programmes at SFU. To begin with, we must build on investments already underway in improving our athletics and recreation facilities. Careful investigation should be made of the possibilities of specialized fitness counselling and personal training as a general option for SFU students. Second, we should investigate ways in which to invigorate extra-curricular programming at SFU. The new Dean of Continuing Studies and AVP Student Services should take leadership in this area, building on the already significant activity at SFU Vancouver, and ensuring more varied programming on Burnaby Mountain and in Surrey. New appointments to the University's Art Galleries should be mandated to create more

varied programming in the visual arts, and we should investigate the possibility of an appointment in Student Services to handle the mandate of an “impresario” assuring that we create opportunities to see interesting film, theatre, dance, and music not available elsewhere. Our objective should be to ensure that SFU becomes a destination for members of the community interested in the performing arts and in public affairs dialogue and debate, as well as providing our students a stimulating on-campus life outside the classroom.

(5) Public Profile

Most members of the SFU community feel, I believe correctly, that the university’s public profile and reputation lags behind its real achievements. We must rectify this situation.

First, we need to improve SFU’s media profile. In part, this requires completion of a visual identity programme currently in progress. More important, we need better focus on strategic media opportunities, with cultivation of press, radio and TV contacts to assure that they pick up on these opportunities. Senior administrators, especially the President, need to emulate the considerable success of SFU faculty members who serve as “expert consultants” to the media.

Second, we need to improve communications and connections with alumni. In part, this is a matter of providing more regular and detailed information on changes at the university, as we have begun to do with reasonable success. More important, however, is the development of effective feedback and communication from alumni, and most important will be the creation of effective networking amongst key alumni who can assist with the broad advancement, government relations, academic and community outreach agenda of the university.

Third, we need to make further improvements in private fundraising. For a new institution, SFU has made very significant progress in this area. However, we need to move from the innovations introduced around the 40th anniversary, “Reaching New Heights” campaign, to a sustainable capacity to plan and market high quality proposals from all quarters of the university, manage effective cultivation and stewardship of external donors, and generate a much higher level of commitment through annual campaigns and bequests from the SFU community of faculty, staff and alumni.

Clearly none of these improvements in our institutional profile can be achieved without an additional investment of resources. We must find ways, despite very tight operating budget constraints, to initiate those investments, or the university will be unable to hold its place, let alone improve its standing in the increasingly competitive environment we face. I am hopeful that the Board of Governors will take an active role in advising on all these fronts, and that all sectors of the university community will embrace the need to give these matters priority attention, as I will.