

For Information



Senate Graduate Studies Committee

1999 REPORT TO SENATE

The Dean of Graduate Studies is responsible for the general supervision of graduate work at the University. This report outlines the position of graduate studies at Simon Fraser University and describes some changes made in 1999. It is very clear that the future will not merely be an extrapolation of the past. Reductions in funding put serious pressure on all the University's programs. In addition, the three-year planning process and the government's increased emphasis on accountability has prompted critical examination of all we are doing.

In January 1994, the combination of the positions of Dean of Graduate Studies and Vice-President, Research was formalized by the President and Board of Governors and re-established the position of Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. The Associate Dean has primary responsibility for matters related to individual student and individual programs, and chairs the Senate Graduate Awards Adjudication Committee and the Assessment Committee for New Graduate Programs. The Dean is responsible for policy matters and external relations, sits on Senate and chairs the Senate Graduate Studies Committee. In fall 1998, Dr. Stephen Hart of the Department of Psychology was appointed to a two-year term as Associate Dean, on my recommendation.

In mid-1999, following a review of Vice-Presidential portfolios, it was decided to separate the positions of Dean of Graduate Studies and Vice President, Research. At the time of writing, the search process for a new Dean of Graduate Studies is underway; the incumbent will continue in his position as Vice-President, Research. After the new Dean assumes the Deanship, the position of Associate Dean will be eliminated.

The 1999 edition of the S.F.U. Graduate Studies Fact Book describes, in quantitative terms, the graduate student body in Fall 1998 and provides some retrospective data on completion rates. It is designed to complement information in the SFU Fact Book, from the Office of Analytical Studies. Copies are available on the Dean of Graduate Studies Web site at <http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/>. We have moved to biennial production due to budget shortfalls, workload pressures and the fact that the cumulative data change rather slowly.

I. Enrolments and Degrees

The Graduate Studies Fact Book shows the recent history of graduate enrolments and degrees granted; a concise, updated version is Appendix A. The FTE enrolment figures should be treated with some caution. Starting in the Fall 1989, a clear definition of Part-Time status was adopted; this was primarily responsible for the change in the (Head Count)/FTE ratio between 88/89 and 89/90. The official recognition of Part-Time status and the introduction of a reduced semester

tuition fee for Part-Time students were major advances in improving the accessibility of our graduate programs. Programs approved for Part-Time study are listed in Appendix B.

II. Degree Completion/Withdrawal

Degree completion times are presented in the Graduate Studies Fact Book. It should be noted that these data do not take into account the possibility that a student may have been enrolled Part-Time for all or part of the program and thus overstate completion times, especially for programs with large numbers of Part-Time students.

Although a trend to longer completion times has been arrested and Master's degree completion times reduced, I remain concerned by what appear in many cases to be excessive times for degree completion. When resources are limited, it is especially important that they be used effectively and efficiently. I am actively encouraging departments to ensure both that their degree requirements are realistic and that their students make satisfactory progress, as required by Senate regulations, toward meeting those requirements. I am also pressing for timely appointment of supervisory committees. In establishing the Graduate Studies Database, I encountered many students who had been here for several years, yet apparently had no supervisory committees. This situation has largely been remedied; regularly, reminders about 'delinquent' students are sent to departments by my office; a minor flood of committee recommendations typically follows. Information on supervision is forwarded to the Office of the Vice-President, Academic for inclusion in the annual CV update process.

The Graduate Studies Handbook, first published in 1991 and updated annually through 1999, contains guidelines for supervisors and students that (if followed) should improve prospects for expeditious degree completion. I have provided Graduate Program Chairs with samples of forms used at SFU and elsewhere for reporting on student progress. The Handbook is now available on SFU's Web site <http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/gradhandbk/>.

Withdrawal rates are also presented in the Graduate Studies Fact Book. There are tremendous variations in rates between programs. The overall rates for the University as a whole are in line with the results of similar studies performed in the U.S. and with a similar study performed by the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies at my initiative.

Nonetheless, I am very concerned about low completion rates in some of our graduate programs. Withdrawal may be due to any one of or a combination of factors including: lack of ability, lack of motivation, lack of financial resources, health problems, and deficiencies in the graduate programs and/or their implementation. As of January 1, 1993, I have instituted an exit questionnaire to gather information about many aspects of our graduate programs from students who successfully complete their degrees and from those who withdraw. Because of the need for confidentiality, the results are analyzed only statistically, once enough students respond; analysis of the second data-set is now underway, as is data obtained from similar questionnaires sent to students who withdrew from their programs without completing the degree. Unfortunately, return rates from students who withdrew were very low. Delivery methods other than mail were explored but ultimately it was decided that it would be impossible to achieve acceptable response rates without spending inappropriate amounts of money and time.

Another serious concern is the 'climate' that graduate students experience at SFU. To learn more and to attempt to identify the most pressing problems, I instituted a major study. This was based

in part on the study recently completed in 1995 at UBC. A task force, under the leadership of Dr. Ellen Gee, with representation from the SFSS/GIC and TSSU, completed the survey last spring and a report is available on the web at <http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/survey/index.htm> . I was pleased with the overall results of the survey; despite some problem areas, most students in most departments rated their supervisors and their general environment highly.

Upon receipt of the report, I formed an implementation task force to consider the results of the survey and recommendations of the survey task force, under the able leadership of Dr. Katherine Heinrich. Their report was completed in November 1998 and is available at <http://www.sfu.ca/vpacademic/planning/gssitf/index.html> . The recommendations are now being considered by the units within the university to whom they were addressed. These include academic Departments, Faculties, Deans, the Registrar, Vice-Presidents and me. I have completed a survey of graduate programs concerning the degree to which their units conform to the description of an 'ideal department' as described in the report of the implementation task force. Results will be published shortly.

III. Grades

The Graduate Studies Fact Book gives information on the S.F.U. graduate grades of the end of the Summer 1998 semester; it excludes students who had not yet taken an S.F.U. graduate course. Data were taken from the Registrar's data files and incorporated into and processed within the Graduate Studies Database system.

There is a tremendous range in the grade distributions among departments that may stem from two causes: (1) differences in grading practices and (2) differences in the abilities of students. I believe that, most likely, it is a mixture of these with the former a larger contributor than the latter. This range is one of the reasons that I moved away from interdepartmental comparisons of CGPA in the ranking of applicants for S.F.U. graduate scholarships.

IV. Special Arrangements

The Senate Graduate Studies Committee serves as the Graduate Program Committee of students enrolled under Special Arrangements. Special Arrangements provide opportunities for students who are 'exceptionally able' to pursue graduate programs of their own design, outside the existing departmental boundaries. Dr. Hart and I have given special attention to these students. With the goal of ensuring their satisfactory progress, we have brought all their supervisory committees into compliance with Senate's regulations and require up-to-date progress reports as a condition of registration. The response of students and supervisors has been excellent.

I am pleased to report that the defences of theses completed under Special Arrangements, which Dr. Hart normally chairs, have all been quite successful. Historically, Special Arrangements has been a high risk area; students typically either succeed or fail spectacularly. The number of students enrolled have remained roughly constant in the range 20 - 30. Degree completion has been variable; see the table below (degrees completed in each calendar year):

1981	4	1984	6	1987	7	1990	2	1993	3	1996	3	1999	2
1982	2	1985	2	1988	4	1991	6	1994	3	1997	2		
1983	1	1986	6	1989	3	1992	4	1995	2	1998	4		

Some other students have dropped out and others encountered health problems. By the steps outlined above and by continued rigorous adherence to the criteria for entrance into Special Ar-

rangements, we hope to improve the success rate. We have also moved to an annual admission cycle and have decided to reject incomplete applications, which has reduced the very heavy workload presented by these applications. A cohort-based Special Arrangements option was approved by Senate and the first such program is under final consideration at the time of writing.

V. Administration

In September 1993, a graduate application fee was introduced. The fee is currently \$55. Revenues are directed to General University Revenues and to my office in the proportion of 30:70. Most of the funds directed to my office are transferred to departments to assist in meeting the costs of recruiting, processing of the applications, and student travel for research and conference attendance. I have just completed a survey of the use of these funds by Departments; the results will be published shortly.

In view of current and anticipated financial difficulties, it will be essential to make the most effective use of our limited resources. To this end, I have instituted a review of administrative procedures, in both the academic and scholarships areas, with the goal of eliminating approvals and other administrative actions that may have been of value at one point in the history of the university, but are no longer necessary. Examples may be the approval of examining committees by Faculty Graduate Studies Committees and the provision of official transcripts with all applications for scholarships. We have also introduced web-based forms for the making of recommendations of supervisory and examining committees and for graduate scholarships. It has been necessary to reduce the number and cost of in-person examinations of doctoral theses by making *in absentia* examination the preferred option.

VI. S.G.S.C. Motions

A summary of the motions passed by the S.G.S.C. in 1999, prepared by the Office of the Registrar, is presented in Appendix C.

VII. The Future

I remain optimistic about the future of graduate studies at SFU. Over the last several years, we introduced a number of new programs which are in the process of implementation. Other exciting new program initiatives are presently in the planning/approval process. It will be essential to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to support present and future programs, while maintaining high quality. Under consideration is the setting of enrolment targets at the Faculty level. New programs should be mounted only if there is demonstrated demand and adequate resources provided; this may imply the discontinuation of other, less successful programs. This is consistent with the recommendations of the Graduate Student Survey Implementation Task Force and the three-year plan of the Vice-President, Academic. The current three-year planning process will be helpful in determining the priorities that should be assigned by departments and by the University to each of our graduate programs.

The quality of most of our existing programs is high, as is the quality of most of the thesis defences which I have attended. With rare exception, applicants recommended by departments for entry into Ph.D. programs have been very strong. Through aggressive recruiting of excellent applicants with the aid of entrance scholarships and enhanced support packages, rigorous enforcement of the requirements for satisfactory progress, improved financial aid and careful monitoring

of student supervision, it should be possible to improve further the quality of our graduate programs, reduce withdrawal rates and decrease degree completion times.

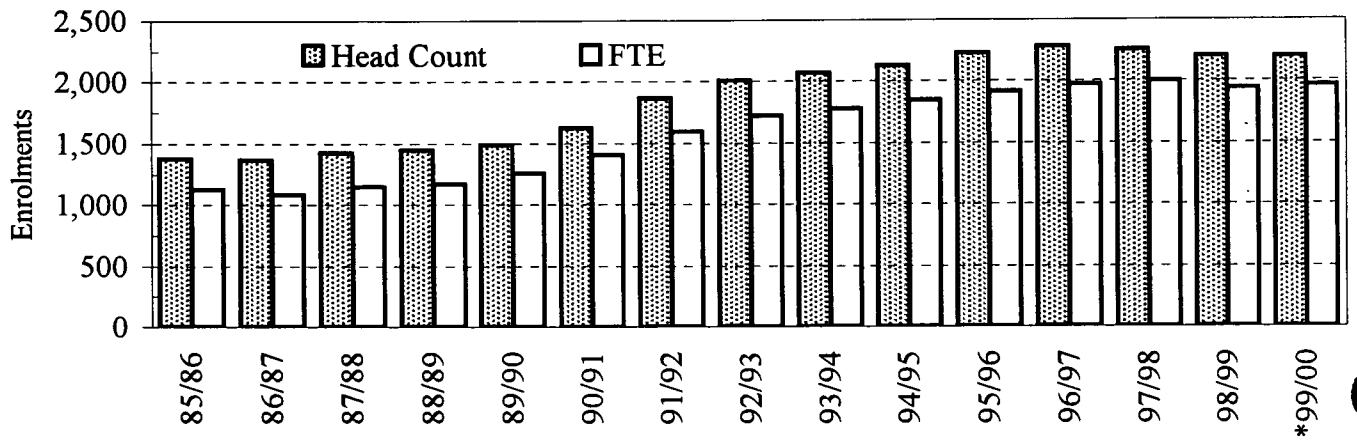
A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bruce Clayman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Bruce P. Clayman
Dean of Graduate Studies

Appendix A

Annualized Graduate Enrolments for Fiscal Years:

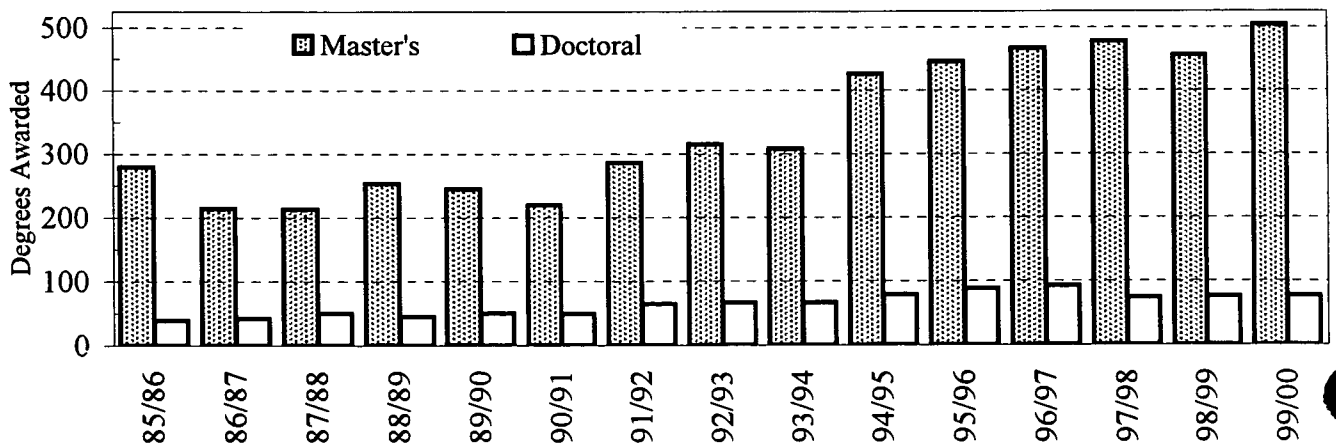
	85/86	86/87	87/88	88/89	89/90	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	*99/00
Head Count	1,377	1,366	1,426	1,444	1,486	1,623	1,864	2,008	2,071	2,128	2,225	2,282	2,254	2,201	2,196
FTE	1,125	1,084	1,147	1,169	1,256	1,404	1,594	1,720	1,779	1,844	1,914	1,972	1,997	1,938	1,959



*(projected)

Degrees Awarded in Fiscal Years:

	85/86	86/87	87/88	88/89	89/90	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00
Master's	279	214	213	253	245	219	285	315	308	425	444	466	477	455	504
Doctoral	39	42	50	45	50	49	64	66	66	78	88	92	73	75	76



Appendix B

Programs approved for part-time study, as of December 1999:

Archaeology (M.A., Ph.D.)
Biological Sciences (MPM)
Business Administration (Exec MBA)
Communication (M.A., Ph.D.)
Economics (M.A., Ph.D.)
Education (M.A., M.Sc., M.Ed.)
Engineering Science (M.Eng.)
English (M.A., Ph.D.)
French (M.A.)
History (M.A., Ph.D.)
Liberal Studies (M.A.)
Mathematics and Statistics (M.Sc., Ph.D.)
Physics (M.Sc., Ph.D.)
Political Science (M.A.)
Publishing (M.Publ)
Resource and Environment Management (REM)
Latin American Studies (M.A.)
Special Arrangements (M.A., Ph.D.)
Women's Studies (M.A.)

Appendix C

Report to Senate of the Activities of the Senate Graduate Studies Committee from January 1, 1999 to December 31, 1999.

1. Number of Meetings - 6
2. **Approved** EMBA Cohort Option for Master's Degree under Special Arrangements.
3. **Discussed** Graduate Student Survey Implementation Task Force Report.
4. **Approved** Graduate Diploma in Education.
5. **Considered** five recommendations for admission under Special Arrangements. Three approved, one denied, one tabled.
6. **Approved** Graduate Curriculum Changes in Education, Gerontology, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology/Anthropology, Women's Studies, Resource and Environmental Management, Economics, French, Geography, Linguistics, Business Administration, Biological Sciences, Physics, and Mathematics and Statistics