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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, BURNABY, B.C., CANADA V5A 1S6
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT: 291-4841

April 27, 1981

William C. Gibson, M.D., F.R.C.P.
Chairman
Universities Council of B. C.
Ste. 500 - 805 West Broadway
Vancouver, B. C.
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Dear Dr. Gibson:

This letter is in response to the comment which you made at the Friday, April 24th meeting of Ministry officials, the three university presidents and yourself, to the effect that the UCBC would be interested in the reaction of each of the universities to the recent recommendations of the Council on engineering education in B.C. We at SFU were not aware that you were seeking our general reaction, although of course you have been advised of the grave concerns of both our Senate and our Board of Governors. My formal response to you, dated April 22nd, is concerned only with your request that we respond as quickly as possible to Council's recommendation that we consider the appropriateness of initiating a program of engineering science at SFU. The fact that we have provided the latter should in no way be construed to mean that we are supportive of the Council's overall recommendations to the Minister on the future of engineering education in this province. On the contrary, like the Ministry officials who have commented, we have important reservations and objections. Succinctly, we find the report which was endorsed by UCBC to be unacceptable.

We do not take this position frivolously or irresponsibly; rather we suggest to you that the report upon which action was taken is virtually without rationale of any kind. Given the important possible consequences of these recommendations to the Province of B.C. and its universities, we at SFU would have expected a substantive report which would have been thoroughly considered by Council and its committees before any final recommendations were made.



For those of us at SFU, the issue is a much larger one than the simple question of having an engineering faculty. Rather, it is the fundamental question of whether this institution is going to be allowed to initiate any of the traditional professional schools. To deny us the opportunity to continue to develop engineering here is taken as an indication that, in the view of UCBC, Simon Fraser University should continue to constrain itself to the basic liberal arts, plus some innovative but relatively small quasi-professional programs. Such a perspective is totally contrary to any well-reasoned academic planning that is going on in North America and we at SFU are not prepared to accept it. Personally, I am not about to see my institution treated as some kind of "second-class academic citizen" that is permitted to initiate a few "crumbs" of new programs, but never anything of major substance.

In making my comments here, I want to assure you that I have no quarrel whatsoever with the University of Victoria having a school of engineering. Certainly, I have no desire to begin to make comparisons between the two proposals, even though I know both institutions reasonably well, academically and otherwise. Let me instead elaborate some of the reasons I believe Council's recent recommendations should be reconsidered.

First, I have already indicated my concern about the lack of rationale, an obvious observation that everyone who reads the statement makes. To suggest geographical location in isolation from demography is not particularly convincing. Similarly, the suggestion that student urban/rural orientation is a basis for millions of dollars of provincial investment is equally unconvincing. In this regard, I am particularly supportive of Deputy Minister Stewart's request that a well-documented report be prepared and the underlying rationale clearly articulated.

For example, as nearly as I can determine, there is nothing in the report which deals with such fundamental issues as:

- a) the relative academic merits of the proposals submitted;
- b) the relative capacity of the respective institutions to provide the basic disciplinary support needed within for a successful program in engineering;

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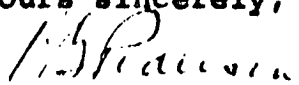
- c) the relevant fiscal aspects of the various options which the committee considered;
- d) the demography of the province with respect, not only to where the populations surges are going to occur but also where economic development of all kinds is going to take place, including I hope, research and development activities.

As you are already aware, we at SFU have questions about the procedures which UCBC employed once the report was received. We in the B.C. university system have struggled unevenly over the past few years to establish some procedures by which educational planning could be modestly predictable. Included in these various planning functions are the committees of Council. In this regard, given the importance of engineering education, would it not have been reasonable to have the Long Range Planning Committee consider this report? Or, failing that, could the Program Co-ordinating Committee not have been helpful? Both the process used and the speed with which a decision was reached are matters of concern to us.

Finally, we would like to observe that the means used for announcing the UCBC engineering recommendations is of concern. Normally UCBC recommendations are sent to the Minister without benefit of media release of any kind, thereby avoiding all the usual problems associated with raised expectations and the like. Furthermore, such a low-profile procedure allows the Minister responsible the opportunity to prepare the way politically and financially for any major investment. From what I have been able to determine, the fact that the recommendations were treated in some sense as a fait accompli is certain to make this matter of engineering education a difficult one to resolve. For example, one can just imagine the questions already being formulated by Treasury Board staff.

Let me conclude by emphasizing our perception that the ad hoc committee's report on engineering requires further consideration. This point of view is unanimously endorsed by our Board, our Senate, and the total academic and administrative community of Simon Fraser University. A failure to reconsider will, from our perspective, result in a serious erosion of confidence in the work of your Council. Equally important, it will not allow this institution to achieve the academic development necessary for its maximum contribution to the welfare of this province.

Yours sincerely,


K. George Pedersen
President

KGP:ajj

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cc: Dr. J.M. Munro, Vice-President, Academic
Dr. T. Calvert, Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies
and Director, Engineering Program
Dr. R. Parkinson, Chairman, Board of Governors
Mr. P.T. Côté, Chancellor
The Hon. P.L. McGeer, Minister, Universities,
Science and Communications

bcc: Dr. R. Stewart, Deputy Minister
Ministry of Universities, Science and Communications
Mr. A.E. Soles, Assistant Deputy Minister of Universities
Ministry of Universities, Science and Communications

Board of Governors
Executive Council