

Simon Fraser University

Office of the President

Memorandum

To: Senate

From: Jack P. Blaney
President

Re: President's Agenda

Date: September 25, 1998

Attached are my objectives and priorities for the next two years which were discussed with the Board of Governors on 24 September, 1998. I am forwarding this paper to Senate for comment and discussion.



attachment

DISCUSSION DRAFT - September 25, 1998

President's Agenda

“SFU is not like any other university in this country.
It looks different, and it feels different.
What is unique and remarkable about SFU is that
it challenges us to make our spaces our own”

(Catherine Connors,
Student Convocation Address, June, 1998.)

What sets SFU apart and makes it distinctive? In part, the answer lies with our beginnings.

In May, 1963, when Premier W.A.C. Bennett asked Gordon Shrum to build SFU, he told Dr. Shrum that he wanted the University open in September, 1965. Perhaps, said the Premier to Dr. Shrum, you might want to think about my offer and get back to me. Gordon Shrum's response was immediate: “Mr. Premier, if you want the University open in fall, 1965, let's do it.”

Gordon Shrum's activist approach to building Simon Fraser University shaped our early years: we were the first Canadian university to operate year-round on a trimester system; the first to adopt a full tutorial system (borrowing from the traditions of Cambridge and Oxford). These were the beginnings of many bold initiatives throughout our 33 years.

This enterprising spirit continues to this day, and more than ever we must be alert to bureaucratic tendencies; to ensuring that our energies are not consumed by procedures and processes that do not enrich our fundamental activities of teaching and research. We will

welcome and seize grand challenges, nurture our spirit of adventure, and strengthen our support for bold initiatives. This must and will be agenda item number one.

The second distinguishing feature of Simon Fraser University is our sense of inclusiveness, of connection, of community.

The late sixties were times of turmoil and excitement on Burnaby Mountain and I am absolutely certain that we all gained from that intellectual and political ferment. We came out of that period a more free-wheeling, inclusive institution and remain, today, one of the most open, consultative universities in Canada. Intellectual and academic freedom are the foundations of an authentic university and these freedoms flourish best in an open, inclusive community. We shall steadfastly dedicate ourselves to continuing that way of doing business.

Our commitment to inclusiveness goes beyond our peak location. In spite of our mountain-top site -- the only North American university so situated -- we have developed a distinguished record of inviting the community to the mountain, and extending the resources and spirit of the mountain to the community. For more than twenty years, in over a dozen places throughout the province, we have been educating students to become teachers; we have a full degree and research program in Kamloops with the Shuswap Nation; we are educating Cominco employees in Trail, B.C.; and we have educational projects in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and other sites around the world. Ten years ago we established Simon Fraser University at Harbour Centre where we are now creating the Centre for Dialogue. Being part of the larger community clearly is one of our defining strengths and we shall continue to build on

this strength: by recognizing and inviting community experts into our classrooms; by establishing strategic partnerships with The University of British Columbia, BCIT, and other organizations; by operating the Centre for Dialogue as an urban, provincial, national and international resource; by encouraging our scholars to engage in professional service to the community; by acknowledging that we serve society best by being an integral part of its communities; and by being intellectually and academically alert to society's dreams.

Thus, our special character as a university relates to attitude and to the way we do our work. We need to celebrate and reinforce these unique qualities. And, as we move forward to serve our students, communities and society, we will draw on these unique qualities to strengthen what we fundamentally share with the finest research universities of the world.

A university, in at least one respect, is like any other organization -- a business, cultural group, sports team. If you do not get the fundamentals right, or if your basic elements are not strong, everything else you do is built on quicksand.

Our fundamentals as a research university are defined by our commitment to academic and intellectual freedom, to intellectual integrity, to internationally recognized discovery and research, and to the highest standards of teaching. Research, teaching and service to the community are intertwined.

All of us in all universities share a responsibility to communicate more effectively what it is that universities do and how they can best serve society. We need to more often and more

carefully listen to our community; we need also to more effectively communicate the university's fundamental mission so that our case for public support becomes a case the public will carry with enthusiasm. Professional, career-oriented programs are well understood and accorded high value, as they should be. However, the long-term interests of our knowledge-based society depend as much, indeed, perhaps more, on the research university's strengths and capacity in the fundamental disciplines and in basic, curiosity-driven research. I believe this to be true, but I believe as well that we have taken for granted the public's support for this position, or we simply have not worried about it at all. We can no longer afford to do that.

In teaching, research, and discovery, quality depends on the talent and creativity of people: students, faculty and staff within the University, and alumni, visiting faculty and friends in the community. The commitment of these remarkable people has built the strong reputation Simon Fraser University enjoys; these same people, working together, will help us meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.

With many priorities, you have no priorities. Clearly everything we choose to do should be done well, and, fortunately, our University has many unusually dedicated people who give strong leadership in teaching, research and service. Among the many challenges I could attend to and encourage, in addition to those noted above, a few shall have highest priority.

Students

Our students are an extremely rich and varied group which includes full-time students straight from our high schools and colleges, students who combine careers with further studies,

students from other parts of Canada and the world, students undertaking graduate diplomas and degrees, and students who join us for short courses, seminars and conferences. This learning community is unusually inclusive, concentrated mostly on the mountain and downtown, but spread throughout the province and the world. The challenges these students face include access to graduate and undergraduate programs, opportunities to continue their education throughout their careers and, for some, having the opportunity to experience living in residence during their studies. Of the many important tasks to attend to in fulfilling our duty to these students, I will pay particular attention to the following:

- To help ensure access to university, regardless of financial means, increase by 25 percent scholarship and bursary endowments
- To better prepare our graduates for careers and employment, increase by 25 percent combined work-study opportunities, and strengthen career orientation and placement services
- To assist adults with first degrees to advance their qualifications, double the number of specially designed masters degrees and other post graduate studies
- To provide more students with the option of living on campus, ensure that student residences are doubled as part of our plans for developing the village community on Burnaby Mountain.

Faculty

More than any other factor, the promise of a university is defined by the talents and achievements of its faculty. And increasingly, intellectual skills and achievements are scarce and prized resources. All organizations operating in a competitive world know that attracting, nurturing and keeping the most talented individuals are indispensable to their success. Research universities like Simon Fraser University operate in as competitive an environment as any. It is increasingly difficult and challenging to attract, recognize, and retain our best scholars, and to give them the tools required to do the kind of job the community rightly expects of us. The competition in hiring and keeping top people will be exacerbated as those hired in the booming 1960s retire everywhere.

Our faculty are one of our acknowledged strengths: we must and shall seek opportunities for their continual support, renewal and revitalization. I am committed to the following actions:

- To seek innovative and challenging ideas for renewing the faculty resource, establish a President's Task Force on Faculty Renewal and Recruitment
- To be more competitive in recruiting and retaining the very best scholars, triple the number of endowed professorships across all Faculties
- To accelerate and focus the renewal of research and teaching, bridge strategic appointments to known retirements
- To ensure that our research and teaching will be as contemporary and competitive as any university in Canada, secure new ways to fund critical infrastructure requirements for equipment, information technology and information services, including the Library

The Continuing Agenda

We also must remain alert to our on-going agenda: achieving greater equity in hiring and promotion; ensuring that university staff, many of whom are our most spirited and dedicated university citizens, are full partners in our enterprise; advancing the development of a unique and integrated village on Burnaby Mountain; and increasing the capacity and infrastructure for teaching and research at both campuses.

To achieve these goals we must sustain an open and cohesive campus community in which dedicated students, engaged and valued staff, and creative and committed faculty work together as partners. We must ensure that the multitude of talents within Simon Fraser University are supported and effectively deployed throughout each individual's career.

My overriding ambition is to help provide the leadership that will continue to bring together Simon Fraser University and our communities in a productive and exciting intellectual partnership. We will build on our strengths, and continue to be an institution which is integral and essential to the development of British Columbia and British Columbians.

“ ... of all the lessons I have learned at Simon Fraser University one alone emerges as the most genuine and reflective of my time here: ‘I can do this.’ As we scatter to the winds after this Convocation, we must remember that everything is possible”

(Jason Lyall,
Student Convocation Address, June, 1998)