Sociology/Anthropology

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY OFFICE
Burnaby, B.C., V5A 1S6

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General Office: (604) 291-3146
FAX: (604) 291-5799

Date: 23 April 1996

To: Ron Heath
         Registrar

From: Ellen Gee
         Chair

Re: **SCUTL Annual Report**

....

Please find enclosed a copy of the annual report of the Senate Committee on University Teaching and

Learning.

EG/mn

Enclosure

24 April 1996

REPORT OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND LEARNING (SCUTL)

During its second year in operation SCUTL met 11 times (over the period 1 May 1995-1 May 1996). Over the year, SCUTL was involved in four main activities:

(1) *Course evaluations*

SCUTL refined its test version of a course evaluation form, and administered a test pilot in July 1995 (i.e., near the end of the summer semester). With the assistance of Sue Roppel in Analytical Studies, a random sample of courses was drawn. Instructors were contacted by SCUTL and requested to participate, with the assurance that all results would be kept confidential. All instructors whose courses were drawn for the random sample agreed to participate (with the exception of three courses which had been held during intersession and were thus over). Dr. Charmaine Dean and a number of graduate students in the Math/Statistics Department ably carried out the actual administration of the course evaluation forms for the pilot test. In the end, we collected data from 18 courses and 404 students, representing all five faculties.

Peter Coleman and Larry Weldon, both members of SCUTL, performed preliminary analyses of the data. However, the task quickly developed into a very time-consuming one. At SCUTL's request, Vice-President Gagan provided some funds for the committee to hire a student to finish off the analyses. This student will complete the task over the summer 1996 semester. On the basis of the results, a second pilot will be done, most likely in the fall 1996 semester.

Given the range of opinions regarding course evaluations, SCUTL will be putting on a university-wide forum for the discussion of this topic, in conjunction with the second pilot test.

(2) *Student Forum*

On 16 January, SCUTL held a student forum for a discussion of the factors that facilitate or hinder learning from students' perspectives. SCUTL members felt it very important to host a forum that focussed on learning (cf. teaching) and that provided students an opportunity to voice *their* concerns/opinions. Planning for the forum was facilitated by Richard Day and Lori Barkley (two graduate students representing TSSU),Kristjan Arnason(representing the Student Society), and Rhona Steinberg of Counselling Services (representing Student Services). *See the attachment* for material on, and following from, this forum.
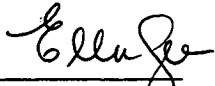
(3) *Teaching Awards*

In keeping with our Senate-defined mandate, SCUTL has begun to examine issues surrounding Excellence in Teaching awards. A meeting with TSSU representatives was held in April 1996 to explore avenues for the recognition of the teaching of TSSU members. Three members of SCUTL are awaiting the scheduling of a meeting, through the Office of the Vice-President (Academic), with representatives of the Alumni Association regarding current selection practices.

(4) *Budget Cutbacks and Teaching/Learning*

SCUTL is in the process of assessing the impact of budget cutbacks on the teaching and learning environment at the university. The Committee has contacted all Chairs for information on their budget modelling exercises, and has received feedback from a number of units. A reminder notice was sent out at the end of April, and it is anticipated that more information will be obtained shortly.

Submitted by:

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Ellen M. Gee
Chair, SCUTL

The Senate Committee on University Teaching and Learning and the Centre for University Teaching

present

A Student Forum on Teaching and Learning

Tuesday, February 13
Halpern Centre   1:30 - 4:30

What factors affect your learning here at SFU? In what ways can your learning be best supported? What forms should teaching and learning take at SFU in the future? These are just a few of the many questions we will be exploring in the first Student Forum on Teaching and Learning. The Senate Committee on University Teaching and Learning wants to hear from you, and wants to provide you with an opportunity to talk with other students about issues that matter to you. Make plans to attend this important event.

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Session One   1:30 - 2:20
(For Students Only)
What Factors Affect Your Learning at SFU?
A Chance to Inform SCUTL

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Session Two   2:30 - 3:20
Good Students and Good Instructors.
A Discussion Among Faculty and Students

❖❖❖

Session Three   3:30 - 4:20
Where is Education Going?
Ways of Teaching and Learning in the Future

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Welcome To

A Student Forum on Teaching and Learning at SFU

Session One: (For Students Only) What Factors Affect Your Learning at SFU? A Chance to Inform SCUTL

In what ways is your learning made easier or more difficult at SFU? How can your learning be best supported? What aspects of teaching and learning at SFU do you want to see preserved? Changed?

Session Two: Good Students and Good Instructors: A Panel Discussion

How do faculty define good students? How do students define good instructors?

Session Three: Where is Education Going? Ways of Teaching and Learning in the Future

What do students and instructors know about on-line course delivery and other forms of educational technology? What are their opinions of such courses? Can we effectively replace traditional lectures with other modes of information dissemination? Are we doing all we can to enhance current lectures? Is information access improving?

Forum Explores Students' Perceptions of Learning and Teaching at SFU

On February 13th, the Senate Committee on University Teaching and Learning (SCUTL) and the Centre for University Teaching held the first Student Forum on Teaching and Learning. The afternoon was divided into three sessions: a student-only hour, a faculty/student panel, and a small-groups session discussing directions for SFU's teaching and learning in the future.

In the first session, students were invited to speak freely regarding factors they saw as facilitating or hindering their learning at the University. To avoid any possible inhibitions, faculty did not attend this session. Instead, notes were taken by students and these were passed on to SCUTL so that the committee could develop a better appreciation of teaching and learning from the students' perspectives. Undergraduate and graduate students participated, providing some useful insights into what we do well and not so well as we support their learning.

One of the first themes that emerges from a reading of the notes on students' comments is that individual support staff can play an important facilitating role in students learning. Staff who take an interest in students can affect a student's interest in a field of study and even his or her choice of major.

More generally, it appears that *interpersonal* factors are very important to students when discussing what facilitates their learning. For example, opportunities to interact in small group seminars were cited as being valuable. Regarding the instructor's role in these classes, it was mentioned that he or she should be sure to give students a chance to voice their opinions, questions and concerns. On the other hand, students talked positively about a seminar class in which two profs attended and engaged in discussion and debate.

Pursuing this interactive theme further, students said that opportunities to talk one-on-one with professors was helpful. Also, it was suggested that more graduate students,

> *... it was mentioned that the instructor should be sure to give students a chance to voice their opinions, questions and concerns.*

in addition to TAs, could attend tutorials and seminars, giving undergraduates more opportunities to interact with people engaged in intense study of a specialized field.

Open labs in math and other sciences were considered to be helpful, as were on-line connections to the library. The co-op education program was also endorsed as something that facilitated learning.

Students expressed appreciation for instructors who exhibit enthusiasm and who have a sense of humour.

What inhibits learning at SFU? According to some students, a competition-based system of grading inhibits the interaction between students that can be a valuable way to learn. There is a contradiction between a grading system that is inherently competitive and an emerging pedagogy that claims to encourage cooperation.

Also, students attending the forum suggested that there could be more communication between departments and programs to reduce redundancy and, more importantly, to provide more opportunities for students to take multidisciplinary approaches to solving problems. While students acknowledged that SFU offers more interdisciplinary programs that many universities, they would like even more.

Students in this session believed that they needed more access to our library. In particular, they wanted hours expanded. Closing at six on Fridays can be a problem for students.

Students also talked in more general terms about the goals of the University. In particular, they discussed the apparent dichotomy between producing prospective employees for the work force and providing people with opportunities for personal enhancement through learning.

The comments cited here represent the views of the 20 or so people who attended this part of the forum. We can only guess at their representativeness. Still, comments like these provide valuable feedback for committees like SCUTL and the Centre for University Teaching.◊

Teaching and Learning at SFU in the Future as Envisioned by Participants at the Student Forum

Participants at the Student Forum on Teaching and Learning held recently at SFU engaged in a small-groups exercise in which they were asked to design their preferred university of the future. What would we want to change? What do we want to preserve?

There was considerable consensus within and between groups regarding such things as the use of educational and information technology, as well as on the value of face-to-face learning opportunities. If the university of the future is to succeed, it must take full advantage of the former without sacrificing the latter.

Computer-aided, on-line learning will be an integral part of the university of the future, but not to the exclusion of learning environments in which people meet in actual (as opposed to virtual) classrooms to learn together.

This "place" we call Simon Fraser University is bound to expand in many ways, both architecturally and virtually. In the SFU of the future, as designed by participants at our Forum, access to courses will be one of the clear areas of major growth. Unrestricted by geographic distance, students the world over will be able to take virtual versions of our courses. There will be a corresponding expansion of our access to knowledge and to people who possess that knowledge.

And if SFU can expand in these ways, so can other universities. This will mean that the boundaries between institutions will blur. The university as designed by our groups will have flexible systems for transferring credits between institutions. A university degree may consist of a hybrid collection of courses taken from institutions the world over.

What, then, would it mean to be an "SFU student?" This questions, according to Forum participants, hints at a potential downside of a university system featuring a technologically linked student body floating

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rather ill-defined somewhere in cyberspace. As exciting as the prospects are for educational and information technology, Forum participants were quite unified in the value they ascribed to SFU as a real place in which they could experience more immediate contact with others.

The university of the future would not be without tradition. Spontaneous debates in real time, graduation ceremonies, protest rallies, late night talks in residence, events in the theatre, the gym, and elsewhere contribute to a holistic university experience that cannot be captured adequately via virtual reality.

How do we create this university that takes full advantage of technology while retaining its human touch and sense of place? This will be no easy task.

In Canada, SFU is a leader in research and development in the area of on-line education. Faculty and staff working on Innovation Fund projects are developing World Wide Web-based curricula that attempt to preserve the essence of what a university course should be.

At the same time, there were those at our Forum who believe that the great universities of the future will look much like the great universities of the 19th century. Oxford will always be Oxford, and this is because it will continue to offer a highly valued educational experience — small group interaction, tutoring from experts, and the opportunity to learn autonomously.

It remains to be seen how much of this can be captured in on-line environments. It was evident from the small group exercise at the Forum that there exists some skepticism about the potential for technology to *replace* much of what is good about our university. There was considerable optimism, however, regarding the potential for technology to *enhance* what we do at SFU and elsewhere. ◊