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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

Members of Senate

From K. Strand

Acting President

Subject Academic Planning

Date March 19, 1969

14733-PC

The attached document contains my views on the need for academic planning and a proposal for a planning process at this University. I am presenting it before Senate at this time for debate and analysis. If the proposal is adopted in principle, I would then prepare specific implementation proposals.

K. Strand

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Encl.

ACADEMIC PLANNING AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

THE NEED FOR ACADEMIC PLANNING

Academic planning is necessitated because of two reasons. The first is that physical planning (buildings, etc.) must conform to the requirements of the academic program. Since construction of buildings takes time, academic planning is a prerequisite to physical planning.

The second is that, at any moment of time, resources (faculty, space, finances for operating, etc.) are limited and choices must be made among alternative uses of the University's resources.

Accordingly, what is meant by academic planning is a decision-making process which will permit choices to be made among alternative academic programs and which will develop a projected academic program against which faculty recruitment, library resources, space and other support services can be matched.

For example, if the University adopts a particular type of program which requires a particular configuration of space, then in order for that space to be available it is necessary to know the dimensions and characteristics of that program. In addition, adoption of a particular program requires that a certain pattern of faculty recruitment be undertaken. Furthermore, if the Library and other resources are going to meet the needs of this program, prior knowledge of the nature of the program is required. The conclusion is that if balanced growth of space, faculty, and support services is to occur, then projection and planning of academic programs are essential.

Given a limited amount of money, there are two approaches to growth. The first is that every program can be given some money or that certain programs be given enough money so that they can be meaningful. The first alternative is inefficient but does not require decisions as to relative merits. The second alternative is efficient but requires decisions as to relative merits. In general, the first alternative was followed in establishing the University. A major premise of this paper is that at that time no other alternative was feasible; however, at this time a transition must be made to the second alternative. In short, individual programs have to be given a sufficient commitment of resources in order that they can be viable.

Another characteristic of academic planning at Simon Fraser University has been that the deliberations of Senate have not made a clear delineation between a "change in calendar" and a "new program". As a result this has developed an atmosphere where the apparent manner to obtain approval of new programs and hence a claim on the resources to effectuate it, has been to "get it by Senate". This has led to acrimony. Accordingly, another premise of this paper is that "new programs" must be clearly distinguished from "calendar changes".

A final characteristic of Simon Fraser University is that it was founded on the concept of departments with strong department heads. This type of organization leads to strong traditional disciplines at the cost of development of inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary studies. In other words, the unit for decision making and planning has been that of a department and it must be recognized that a department represents an administrative abstraction for a discipline. However, as disciplines coalesce in some areas and expand in others, a strong traditional department is apt to be divorced from the frontiers of the changing disciplines. This implies that departments should not be the only source from which ideas can be put into the planning process.

PROPOSAL

What is proposed here is a system of priority planning within the university which will develop a list of the academic priorities of this university. The objective is to use the list of academic priorities as the starting point from which to develop the plans necessary for building, recruitment, budgeting and support services.

The proposal is built on the premise there shall be a distinction between ongoing programs and new programs. New programs can be of two types. The first consists of an expansion of the University's offerings based on the new program. The second consists of a restructuring of existing offerings into a new program and may entail no expansion of offerings. An operational definition of the first type of new program is "any change in the University's offerings which requires additional teaching staff, funds and/or space." An operational definition of the second type of new program would be "any restructuring of courses designed to give a different emphasis to the program of a department or a new degree, but which does not require additional teaching staff, funds and/or space."

If the new program is of the second type, i. e. it does not require additional teaching staff, funds and/or space, then approval by Senate is authorization to implement the program.

New programs which require additional teaching staff, funds and/or space, shall go through two cycles of decision making. The first cycle shall be approval in principle. This means that the idea has been approved and that the faculty members who originated the idea have authorization to develop the proposal in greater detail - but not authorization to implement it. Implementation of new programs that require additional teaching staff, funds and/or space depends upon the position that this item eventually holds on the priority list. If the total program is rejected in principle, this means that no further development can be done. If elements of the program are rejected in principle, the faculty members who originated it will be required to revise the proposal and resubmit it. As a corollary, approval in principle can occur at any time in the academic year but the priority assignment can only occur periodically.

Once a program of the second type has been approved in principle, the next task is development of the program in detail. This would involve the listing of the necessary financial obligations, both in terms of operating expenses and salary, the space requirements, and other implied requirements such as library facilities, audio visual, computer and science workshop. These requirements shall be projected forward for a five-year period.

Another premise upon which the proposal is built is that there is a need for a channel to Senate for ideas of an interdisciplinary nature. Before a proposal reaches Senate under the present system, it must first have Faculty approval and Departmental approval. This procedure, by its very nature, tends to preclude Senate consideration of interdisciplinary proposals. What is proposed is that, in the case of new programs proposed by a group of faculty members who are not in the same department, they would first go to a Senate Committee on Interdisciplinary Studies (to be established) for preliminary analysis and, if approved by this committee, the proposal would go directly to Senate for approval in principle. Once approval in principle has been obtained, the detailed development could begin.

The second cycle shall be priority assignment. In the case of new programs proposed by departments, each department shall assign a priority to each new program (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.) Once this departmental priority has been assigned, the next step would be assignment of priorities at the faculty level.

In the case of new programs originating from members of faculty who are not in the same department, i. e. interdisciplinary programs, priorities would be assigned by the Senate Committee on Interdisciplinary Studies.

When new programs originating from departments have been assigned priorities at the level of each faculty and when new programs originating from non-departmental units have been assigned priorities by the Senate Committee on Interdisciplinary Studies, the next task is to integrate the various priority ratings in order to rank all new programs in terms of university priority. This would be the responsibility of the University Academic Planning Committee (to be established by changing the terms of reference and title of the Senate Long Range Academic Planning Committee). The assignment to the University Academic Planning Committee would be to generate the academic priority list.

When the academic priority list has been established, the next step would be to evaluate these priorities against the existing constraints in terms of money and space. Thus, the task of implementation of the academic priority list would be the responsibility of the President. In other words, his responsibility would be to implement, in order of priority, those items that are possible within the present constraints. In addition, his responsibility would be to remove the constraints that prevent the remaining items on the academic priority list from being implemented.

It is important to note that the academic priority list would not imply immediate authorization for implementation. This authorization would come from the President once the constraints permit implementation.

THE ADVANTAGE OF THIS PROPOSAL

The basic advantage of this proposal is that it would permit orderly and balanced growth of academic priorities relative to the constraints of space, finances, support facilities and recruitment.

Secondly, it would establish that a program had been in fact endorsed by the University and that it would be implemented as soon as possible. This would remove a major cause of frustration, namely that of uncertainty.

Thirdly, this proposal would enable new programs to be developed as resources became available. In other words, when monies become free, there would not be the confusion as to what should be done with them, the answer would be to authorize the next item on the academic priority list.

DISADVANTAGES

A disadvantage of this proposal is that it would require acceptance of the priority concept. It requires that there be a clear recognition that there is a difference between acceptance in principle and implementation.

Another disadvantage of the proposal is that there would be a tendency for all units to say yes to all new ideas rather than to say no but to kill in essence, these ideas by placing them low on the priority list.