



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

BURNABY 2 / B.C.

PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

Text of an address to the university community by
Dr. Kenneth Strand, President of Simon Fraser
University, Monday, September 8, 1969.

First as a "new President" let me welcome all new students, new staff and new faculty to Simon Fraser University. As an "ex-Acting President" who has returned let me welcome all returning students, faculty and staff.

At the outset, I wish to state that while I am willing to "come to the Mall" annually, it is not my intention to "report to the Mall" at any time demanded. If the Mall serves any purpose, it is as a forum for the immediate communication of ideas -- not for the solution of problems.

Last year when I spoke to the University community at this time, I had served one month and nine days of a one-year term as Acting-President. My experience was limited, my time horizon short, and my address thin. When I took office as Acting President the university was in a state of crisis largely because many of the basic administrative policies which should have been established in the early days of the university had not been adopted. This legacy of inaction required that highest priority be given to the basic policies dealing with faculty employment conditions and to regularizing administrative techniques. Although new policies have been adopted in such areas as promotion, dismissal, tenure, pensions, and admissions, there is still much to be done in the area of general administration. For example, the policy on sabbatical leave is unfinished, and an adequate salary policy has yet to be devised. An early task will be completion of these unexciting but necessary policies. In addition, certain of the policies that have been adopted should be reviewed and improved. I now intend to set priorities for the completion of basic policies and a general review of those in operation.

A necessary review of educational policy was not initiated in the last year, in part because time was short, but more importantly because it could not or, in my judgement, should not be initiated by an Acting President. As Acting President I felt obligated not to initiate certain policy changes that would commit the President in areas where he should have freedom of action.

Now that the university has a permanent president and the nucleus of an adequate administrative structure, we can focus on the broader question of the educational philosophy of Simon Fraser University. It is time for a reaffirmation of the educational philosophy of this university. As I see it, Simon Fraser's first commitment is to exciting, high quality undergraduate education in the areas of Arts, Science and Education. I wish to comment on the

(more)

pressures that oppose this objective, the areas where the university is falling short of this goal and the implications of this commitment.

One pressure that can work against this goal is an over-emphasis on graduate studies in departments. Let there be no misunderstanding, graduate studies are necessary to the undergraduate program but in the proper balance. We should not produce an overabundance of Ph. D's simply for the sheer joy of teaching graduate students, particularly if this is done at great expense to our undergraduate program.

Another pressure that can work against this goal is the notion that the university can be all things to all people. This pressure and a university's inability to make the choices necessary to set integrated goals is what spawns a multi-versity. I wish to state categorically that I am opposed to a multi-versity.

Several of the more important areas where the university is falling short of the goal of high quality undergraduate education, if my observations are correct, include a lack of balance between the professional emphasis within disciplines and general education, between departmental autonomy and general university welfare, between the university as a place of study and evolution and the conception of the university as an instrument of social change or revolution.

In this context I do not use the words "professional emphasis" to mean professional schools such as schools of medicine or law, but rather the present orientation of some departments toward professional training with insufficient attention given to general education. It is my observation, perhaps incorrect, that as a by-product of the way this university was founded the course structure of many departments is organized as if the basic premise was that a first year student would emerge seven years later with a Ph. D. in that discipline.

I call on departments to conduct an auto-critical review of their course offerings and to assess their relative emphasis between professional training and general education, and to provide more choices for students desiring a broad educational background.

I call on Departments and Faculties to move toward integration, in areas where there is overlap of interests and disciplines, and on Senate to develop a philosophy of purpose and procedures to accommodate the necessary innovations and improvements to our academic programs.

An implication of our goal is that we cannot afford specialization to the exclusion of broad human perspective -- whether it be in the social or physical sciences. Nor can we afford to be so international or eclectic that we overlook the critical importance of careful study of Canadian culture and institutions.

(more)

Canada has its own particular culture and problems and these must be distinguished from the problems that characterize the United States, England or Europe. As a scholar, it was the particular nature of the Canadian economy that attracted me to this Canadian university. As a teacher I was disturbed by the lack of scholarly studies in many important areas. As a president of a Canadian university I encourage individual scholars on this faculty to address themselves to Canadian studies.

I hope within the next year to see a Canadian Studies program instituted. Students and faculty will, I hope, support this program.

Another question we must re-examine is the implicit premise of infinite expansion of SFU. Given the emphasis on high quality undergraduate education there are natural limits to size of the university. My own preference is for a relatively small university -- not much larger than it is at present. This raises the question of internal balance and enrollment restrictions. I would like to avoid what is known as "the edifice complex" and concentrate on the amenities that would make this an educational community rather than an educational way-station.

A reassessment of the tri-mester system is also called for. The original objectives of the tri-mester system and the chief advantages claimed for it were:

1. Maximum flexibility for students in determining the pace of their education.
2. Maximum flexibility for faculty in utilization of their research semesters.
3. Maximum use of facilities over the calendar year.

The ideal pattern to achieve these goals would consist of identical course offerings and enrollments in all three semesters; a condition that has not and cannot be achieved.

The objective of maximum flexibility for students in determining the pace of their education makes enrollments difficult to forecast. For instance, this fall 4100 students sent in cards stating they intended to return whereas, to date, 3700 have returned, a difference of 400. The objective of maximum flexibility for faculty in utilization of their research semester makes future course offerings difficult to schedule. These two factors, plus a curriculum with a minimal number of required courses, results in a registration process of immense complexity. We will move immediately to an effective system of pre-registration. This will require firm advance planning by departments and a firm commitment to future course offerings in order that students may plan their schedules with assurance that courses will be offered.

(more)

Furthermore the hectic pace of the tri-mester system directs attention mostly to immediate problems at the expense of reflection and longer term considerations. This increases the likelihood of administrative problems. Furthermore the constant turnover on faculty committees results in loss of continuity, inaction, and frustration.

Another disadvantage of the tri-mester system as it operates at S. F. U. is that it probably results in higher operating costs. As Acting-President I authorized a study of costs which will isolate the additional cost of the trimester. When this is done every attempt will be made to obtain the necessary finances to operate the tri-mester system. If this is not successful, then a hard look at the advantage of the system relative to its disadvantages must be made.

I suggest that there are also some less obvious disadvantages to the tri-mester system. One is destruction of the sense of community that results when one-third of the faculty is absent every semester. Another disadvantage is the lost opportunity to utilize the summer semester for less conventional approaches to education. Consider what might be possible if the summer semester was limited to a core of courses to be offered every summer and if the freed time, space and resources were utilized for planned experimentation, innovation and interaction with the community.

This brings me to the question of finances. University financing essentially consists of two separate questions -- the amount of money and predictability of the amount of money (capital and operating) that will be available in the future. Our biggest financial handicap is lack of predictability. For instance, this year the total operating budget for the three universities for the present year was known in February, but the share available to each university was not known until June. Moreover even that share is not now firm; five per cent of the total grant is being held back until November to be allocated on the basis of enrollments. This uncertainty precludes orderly development of admissions, recruitment and course scheduling and the implementation of new ideas and programs. An immediate policy objective is to work with the other universities in an attempt to obtain from the government a predictable method of university financing as well as more adequate financing.

Before leaving I would like to speak to the current controversy over several tenure decisions and the CAUT visit. First, under the policy of academic freedom and tenure adopted by the faculty last year, the role of the President is de-limited. A democratically elected committee is primarily responsible for the final recommendations that go to the Board. In several of the widely publicized cases, the decisions are not yet final. Opportunities for further consideration are still open. I am always willing to meet with any individual faculty member who feels aggrieved.

(more)

Finally the visit by two officials from CAUT was not an "investigation" but rather an informal visit in conjunction with a regional convention of Faculty Associations. Until internal procedures have been exhausted, especially in cases where appeals are not yet complete, nor opportunities for further consideration exhausted, neither the university or any individual involved benefits from emotional reaction or uninformed speculation.

In closing, let me state that I regard last year as the year when SFU paused to regroup itself and the coming year as one when it can begin moving forward again.