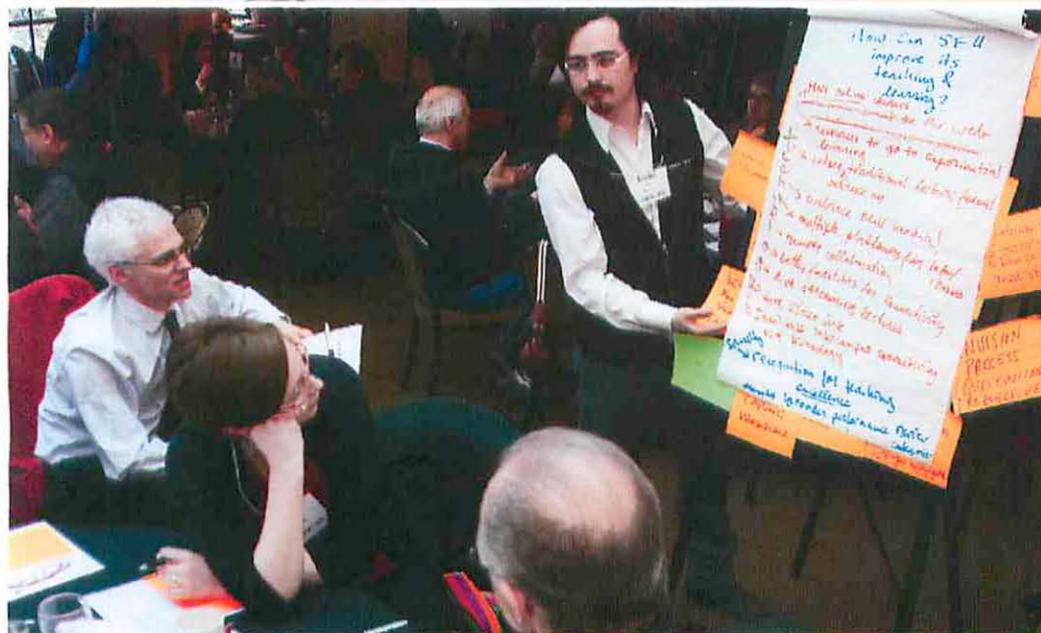




SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
ENVISION DISCUSSION PAPER 2011



## TOWARDS A STRATEGIC VISION

Simon Fraser University occupies a special place on the academic spectrum. While some universities concentrate on undergraduate teaching, and other universities focus their energies on graduate programming and research, SFU fosters a university environment that supports and celebrates the productive interplay of undergraduate education, advanced research and graduate studies. At SFU, intellectual engagement and academic enquiry are energized by valued undergraduate students who, in turn, benefit from their exposure to leading scholars, talented graduate student mentors and advanced research endeavours.

At the same time, SFU has distinguished itself as a university that has established strong and dynamic community connections, and that seeks to harness its educational, research and other resources to contribute to the making of a better society.

These strengths distinguish SFU as a university that is student-centred, research-driven and community-engaged. The challenge now is to forge a strategic vision that captures these strengths, reflects our aspirations for the future, and can help to define and differentiate SFU as the best university of its kind.

## WHY envision>SFU?

envision>SFU is a broad-based process of engagement to develop a strategic vision that both reflects the values and aspirations of Simon Fraser University and responds to the needs and expectations of the communities we serve. It seeks to foster a culture of collaboration and inclusion, align priorities, develop widely supported criteria for success, encourage initiative and celebrate achievement.

Throughout this process, I have had the opportunity to hear from many students, faculty, staff and alumni. I also had the pleasure of attending events at which diverse members of the extended SFU community have had the opportunity to engage with each other, to seek common ground and to discover synergies that can help the university to direct its efforts where it can enjoy the greatest success.

I've also had the chance to speak with many community representatives, both to highlight the important role that SFU plays in the community, and to seek their thoughts and ideas concerning how we can strengthen that role in future.

Thank you for providing your voice and your energy. As is evident from this document, you have helped to identify important ways in which we can build upon our strengths to become even better than we are today. I look forward to continuing this dialogue as we take the next steps in the process of developing our strategic vision and ensuring that SFU makes a distinct and important contribution to society.

**Andrew Petter**  
President and Vice-Chancellor

## WIDESPREAD PARTICIPATION

**envision>SFU** is one of the most extensive community consultation processes ever undertaken by a Canadian university.

The process began on February 10, 2011 with a webcast presentation and panel discussion at SFU Vancouver, release of internal and external discussion papers and the launch of an **envision>SFU** website. Internal consultations started in earnest on February 24 with approximately 150 students, staff and faculty members attending a dialogue event at the Diamond Alumni Centre on Burnaby Mountain.

In March and early April, during 13 focus group sessions facilitated by SFU faculty and staff at the Burnaby, Surrey and Vancouver campuses, small groups of staff, student and faculty explored ten guiding questions in depth. President Petter also hosted five hallway chats on all three campuses which several hundred university members attended. He also met with a wide variety of university groups composed of students, faculty, staff and alumni.

From February through May, President Petter spoke at over a dozen roundtables and events in communities served by the university. These included meetings with business and industry groups, arts organizations, Aboriginal peoples, multicultural communities, and long-time SFU friends and supporters. Meetings were also held to garner input from the mayors and councils of eight BC municipalities, including the cities of Burnaby, Surrey and Vancouver.

Participation in **envision>SFU** was further encouraged through speeches to the Vancouver and Surrey Boards of Trade as well as special presentations to teachers and secondary school students. In addition, two focus groups were conducted with parents of high-school age children.

A communications campaign consisting of bus, newspaper and radio advertisements successfully solicited further input from within SFU and from the general public. More than 15,000 people visited the **envision>SFU** website, and more than half of these visitors moved past the homepage to learn more about the process, read the president's blog posts or answer one of our 10 guiding questions. More than 400 people followed us @envisionSFU on Twitter to stay involved in the conversation.

## THREE STRENGTHS, TEN QUESTIONS

envision>SFU solicited input toward the creation of a strategic vision that builds upon our three defining strengths:

1. Our commitment to students,
2. Our dedication to research, and
3. Our engagement with community.

To gather valuable and consistent information from the diverse categories of people who connect with SFU, participants were asked to address some or all of the following 10 questions:

1. What is distinctive about SFU?
2. How can SFU be more relevant?
3. Is SFU missing opportunities?
4. How can SFU improve teaching and learning?
5. How can SFU make the student experience even better?
6. Can SFU improve the quality and impact of its research?
7. How can SFU strengthen its community ties?
8. Can SFU get more from the interplay of teaching, research and community engagement?
9. What other values should SFU's strategic vision reflect?
10. How can SFU secure the resources to achieve its goals?

## WHAT YOU TOLD US

The envision>SFU process sought input from SFU faculty, staff, students, alumni and community representatives. The following is a summary of the major themes that emerged.

### **SFU has a unique personality and a number of distinctive features**

SFU truly is unique. The following words were used to describe SFU: innovative, vibrant, dynamic, diverse, fun, gutsy, flexible and open to do things differently. It was also noted that SFU is amenable to community partnerships by being approachable, responsive and respectful.

*"SFU is younger, more nimble and innovative and can venture into new fields of knowledge."*

Respondents repeatedly cited a number of attributes that clearly differentiate us from other universities. These include:

- Location – focusing mainly on the mountaintop position of the Burnaby campus and the fact that we have three well-located campuses, each one integrated into the community it serves
- Innovative educational programs – with unique offerings such as the Semester in Dialogue and features such as flexibility (e.g. trimester system, program adaptability), tutorials, leading co-op programs and other experiential learning opportunities
- Community engagement – referenced in numerous ways, including research that is important to the community, teaching that is relevant to the community, facilities and events that are open to the community, a sense of caring about the local, national and international communities
- Diversity and internationalization – represented most obviously by our diverse and international student population and by our international partnerships and programs
- Strong athletics – with a new profile gained from being the first Canadian university in the NCAA
- The right size – large enough to make an impact, small enough to care about students and more nimble than Canada's larger universities

### **Widespread support for the characterization of our three underlying strengths**

In both internal and external consultations, participants were overwhelming positive in their response to the "student-centred, research-driven, community-engaged" model presented in the discussion papers. These three strengths — and resulting synergies — were viewed as a valuable framework for explicating SFU's distinctive qualities and developing a strategic vision that draws upon these qualities.

### **SFU has a strong set of values**

Participants cited a number of values and priorities that SFU should embrace. Topping the list was sustainability, followed by improving access to education, with particular emphasis on making education more available to Indigenous students. Other values and priorities that received attention were experiential learning, innovation, international perspectives, interdisciplinarity, community engagement, intellectual freedom, transparency and respect. When taken together, these values and priorities present a picture of an organization that can hold an important and distinctive place in the local, national and international community.

*"SFU pushes boundaries."*

*"The perception is that SFU is a friendly, student-centered institution. It is easy to go to and is welcoming. SFU is seen as community engaged in a mutually beneficial way."*

*"The (envision>SFU) framework is well-thought through. You are living it and breathing it. Your reach into the community is an asset."*

*"Sustainability values should be reflected in our strategic vision and should be integrated into all aspects of the university. Curriculum, research, facilities, connections with the community."*

### Learning: a multi-dimensional conversation

The **envision>SFU** process sparked the SFU faculty association to propose a definition of what a university could and should be: "a community of scholars, whose fundamental premise is dialogue across disciplines, across generations, across communities, across the mentor/student divide, and across the chasms that remain between research, teaching, and community service."

Participant responses revealed strong support for providing more research education and research opportunities for undergraduate students. Widespread support was also expressed for expanding learning opportunities beyond the classroom. SFU Co-op was cited as one of our strongest assets, but one that could be expanded to offer community-based learning opportunities to even more students. Others called for integrating more experiential learning into the classroom through excursions, projects and guest speakers.

These hands-on educational experiences enable SFU students to learn in the external community while enabling the community to benefit from our students. A strong alumni mentoring program was suggested by many, as this would help expand learning opportunities beyond the walls of the university, while engaging our alumni in contributing to the learning environment and equipping them to become champions for our programs.

There was also much support for creating more lifelong learning opportunities. For SFU alumni, for example, SFU should be their lifelong learning partner. Many also felt that on-line and distance education programs should be expanded so that more people can benefit from SFU educational programs, even from remote locations.

### Build a strong core

While SFU has a number of unique attributes that are recognized by the internal and external community, it will be difficult to continue to flourish over time if we do not pay attention to our core internal community. We must first ensure that every student, faculty and staff member feels they have an important role to play and are engaged with the university and with each other. This will infuse our university community with pride and excitement.

Participants identified a number of areas in which we can improve our internal environment and the student experience. There was a strong call for more student support in general, with comments focusing on a better orientation, better integration of international students, mentorship, more financial support, updated facilities in some areas, better food, better transit and more space for student gatherings. Participants were also looking for more opportunities to connect with each other and to engage across all three campuses.

*"Increase research opportunities for students including undergrads e.g. co-op, internships."*

*"Alumni can play an important role in our current strategic visioning process. They've experienced SFU from the inside, as students, but also from the outside, as members of the community. This gives them a unique understanding of SFU and its potential to be a university that can bridge the academic-community divide."*

*"Build cohorts of students that care for each other."*

*"More fun, community-oriented events would go a long way."*

*"Value the huge commitment and contribution of staff."*

*"Create more opportunities for international students to interact with local students to learn from one another."*

There were also many comments regarding the need for improved student-faculty interaction outside the classroom. This would not only enhance educational opportunities for students, but would also facilitate students and faculty working together in research and outreach activities.

Participants also indicated the need for widespread student participation in the life of the university to create a stronger sense of community.

### Research that makes a difference

While there is a clear recognition that knowledge creation often begins with curiosity-driven research, participants strongly supported the view that SFU research should make a difference to the communities we serve. Interestingly, when participants were asked how we could improve the quality and impact of SFU research, there were very few comments about improving quality. Presumably this means that the quality of our research is seen to be high. However many participants commented that SFU should mobilize research on issues that are important to both local and global communities.

Participants also noted that SFU needs to disseminate our research more actively and explain its value to the community on an ongoing basis. This, in turn, will garner more understanding and support from the community. It will also help to raise our profile on an international scale, attracting faculty and partners from around the world and opening doors to more research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students.

Participants further suggested that SFU should promote the value of its research to society, including the importance of fundamental research in developing new discoveries and applications for the future. We should communicate research outcomes locally, nationally and internationally. Through such efforts, the community is likely to gain a better sense of the benefits of our research. This in turn will open opportunities for dialogue beyond the walls of the university, which will feed back into collaborative research projects with community partners, other universities, government organizations and NGOs.

*"Don't just 'think of the world,' act in the world, apply work – make this part of one's job (connecting research with real-world application)."*

*"Promotion and tenure policies and practices mitigate against involvement for those on a tenure track in many valuable community-based action and applied research activities both at home and abroad. I'd suggest we broaden the type of scholarly endeavour that 'counts' towards the promotion/tenure portfolio."*

*"We need to continue to communicate our research efforts to the public – they're funding a lot of it."*

### **Economic and cultural development**

In addition to SFU's role in bettering the community through its core activities of learning and research, **envision>SFU** participants noted that SFU's three campuses play a role in improving the economic and social development of its neighbourhoods, particularly Surrey's City Centre and Vancouver's Downtown. The campuses attract people and activity to these areas and the students in particular create vibrancy. SFU facilities are open to the public and used by many people outside of academia. Public lectures, performances and events contribute to the cultural and social fabric of the Lower Mainland. Cities where SFU does not have campuses are also receptive to more involvement of faculty and students in their communities through visiting lectures, experiential learning, and cultural and sporting events.

SFU is also seen as a strong link between the Lower Mainland and the international community. The university not only attracts people from all over the world to Vancouver but builds partnerships with organizations, companies, universities and governments abroad. This opens doors for local companies that want to do business abroad.

### **Lead by example**

SFU can strengthen its impact on the communities it serves by playing a leadership role in demonstrating and promoting its core values.

Sustainability was mentioned regularly as an area in which we could play a greater leadership role. Through community dialogue and outreach, creating and mobilizing new knowledge and employing the latest best practices, SFU's three campuses can become models for community sustainability.

Another such area relates to our responsibilities to Aboriginal people and communities. SFU was urged to make additional efforts to broaden access and to create a more welcoming and supportive environment for Aboriginal students. We should also direct our research resources and other capacities to assist Aboriginal communities to address social and environmental problems, to build capacity and become more economically self-sufficient.

*"Create an image of university as a come-to place for all members of the community – not just students. A hub for all ages to mix – the elders, youth, single parents, etc. A place for them to come and get involved – be part of the ongoing research and educational practices."*

*"SFU could play a leadership role in convening important meetings more regularly in areas such as energy, immigration, and health care. SFU could help to accelerate movement on public policy issues. SFU could be a town hall for Canada on important issues."*

*"Create a space that is specific to Aboriginal learners that is reflective of their cultures and values."*

**Tell the world**

SFU is a well-kept secret. Increased promotion was a message that came through loud and clear from SFU representatives as well as the external community. We need to promote our research and better inform the public of its value. If we want to engage the local, national and international communities, we need to tell them how they can engage with us. We need to promote all of our successes, so that students, research partners, industry partners, government partners and community partners feel proud to be members of the SFU community.

We also need to make it as easy as possible for people to connect with SFU. Participants pointed out the need for an access point through which people can connect when they wish to find a co-op student, locate potential research partners or simply learn about SFU events.

*"We need to get story out in public."*

*"Give them a little Hollywood!"*

*"We need a central point of contact to access multidisciplinary talent from across the university in order to facilitate more partnerships."*

## DRAFT STRATEGIC VISION: YOUR FEEDBACK WELCOMED

After reviewing input from **envision>SFU** participants along with our academic and research strategic plans, the following draft strategic vision has been developed for consideration by the university community. It comprises a vision statement, goals, and guiding principles. It also provides examples of possible objectives relating to the goals, and proposes two alternative taglines.

Please take some time to review the draft vision. Consider whether it captures the essence of SFU's strengths and aspirations, and how the university can best serve society. Do you see how you can contribute to advancing this vision? Are there other objectives that should be highlighted to provide examples of how we might pursue these goals? Most importantly, does the vision provide a realizable basis for distinguishing SFU as the best university of its kind?

Feedback will be welcomed until September 30, 2011 at <http://envision.sfu.ca> or via email to [envision@sfu.ca](mailto:envision@sfu.ca).

## OUR VISION:

**To be the leading *engaged research university* defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research, and far-reaching community engagement.**

## OUR GOALS:

- 1. To equip SFU students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences that prepare them for life in an ever-changing and challenging world.**
- 2. To be a world leader in knowledge mobilization founded on research excellence, interdisciplinarity, and reciprocal community engagement.**
- 3. To be Canada's most community-engaged research university.**

The success of these goals depends not just on their individual implementation but on their integration – on the degree to which each contributes to the others. Students will aid and inspire research and contribute to community. Research will enhance the learning experience while enriching the community, socially, economically, scientifically and artistically. And the SFU community of communities – local and global – will serve as a dynamic and limitless classroom, offering context and applicability for students, as well as partnerships, challenges and opportunities for research.

## A PLATFORM FOR KNOWLEDGABLE, ADAPTABLE GLOBAL CITIZENS

**Our Goal: To equip SFU students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences that prepare them for life in an ever-changing and challenging world.**

SFU will employ innovative teaching methods to provide students with the knowledge, critical capacities, research skills and civic understanding they require to become engaged global citizens and to thrive and adapt in demanding and dynamic environments.

SFU students will have opportunities to participate in advanced research, thereby sharing in the labour and joy of creating and applying knowledge, while acquiring the skills for life-long learning.

SFU students will have unparalleled access to experiential learning opportunities that allow them to apply knowledge, to grow as individuals, to engage with diverse communities, to develop entrepreneurial skills and to refine their sense of civic literacy.

### Selected Objectives:

- Ensure that innovative and effective teaching is appropriately rewarded.
- Develop undergraduate students with the foundational writing, quantitative and research skills that promote critical thinking and inform interdisciplinary enquiry.
- Provide graduate students with mentoring by exceptional faculty in high quality and innovative programs that assist them to become outstanding scholars and dynamic leaders.
- Maintain a flexible curriculum that:
  1. Enables students to develop their own learning paths, including paths to graduate degrees and other opportunities.
  2. Enables students to complete educational programs in a timely manner based on their own needs and circumstances.
- Accommodate life-long learners in a wide spectrum of programs, whether they are pursuing introductory courses or participating in the leading applied graduate programs for which SFU is known.
- Provide a welcoming, safe and stimulating campus environment that supplements intellectual engagement with social, cultural, athletic and recreational activities.
- Promote international knowledge and understanding through international courses and lectures, foreign learning opportunities, and facilitated engagement between international and domestic students.

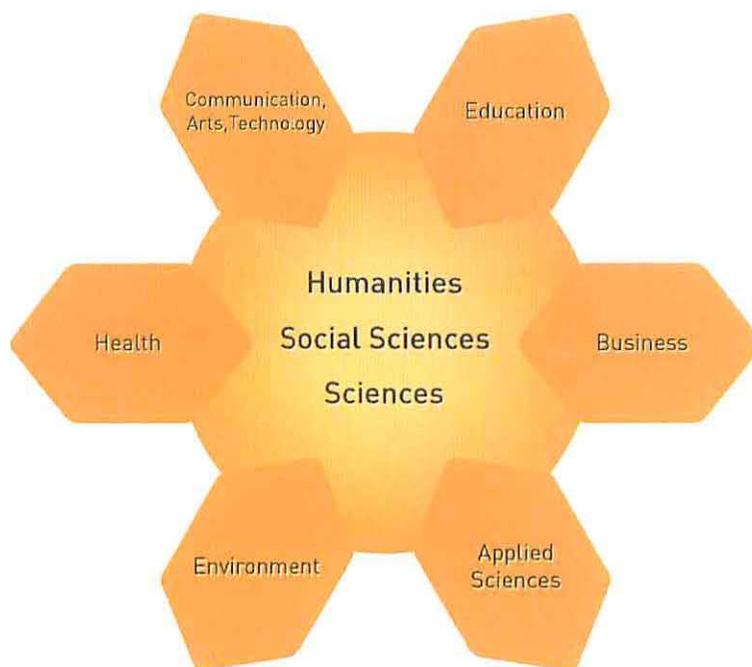
**A WORLD LEADER IN RESEARCH IMPACT**

**Our Goal: To be a world leader in knowledge mobilization founded on research excellence, interdisciplinarity, and reciprocal community engagement.**

SFU will leverage its fundamental research strengths, including interdisciplinary research, close community connections, and partnerships and collaborations to become a global leader in research mobilization.

SFU will support and promote research, from the fundamental, "curiosity-driven" generation of new knowledge, through the dissemination of that knowledge within the academic community and beyond, to the mobilization and commercialization of transformative ideas for the benefit of the university and society.

SFU will support and encourage researchers at every point in their career, including undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, staff members and community partners who assist the research mission.



**Figure: Knowledge Mobilization:  
Building on SFU's Core Strengths**

SFU's faculties focus on social needs, drawing upon a strong Arts and Sciences foundation. The research continuum transits from knowledge generation through dissemination to mobilization.

**Selected Objectives:**

- Attract the best faculty and graduate students.
- Seek new opportunities for research generation, dissemination and mobilization.
- Encourage interdisciplinary research, and research on issues of social significance.
- Acknowledge and support the prominent role of the SFU Library in research generation and dissemination.

- Communicate broadly the positive impacts of our research, to ensure that SFU researchers receive appropriate acknowledgment and to garner support for our research in general and for SFU in particular.
- Promote and support research collaborations with other educational institutions, with public and private sector partners and with members of the community – nationally and internationally.

### AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY PARTNER

#### **Our Goal: To be Canada's most community-engaged research university.**

SFU will maintain and expand its community connections as an integral part of its mission, creating opportunities for practical and experiential learning; informing and inspiring our research; and contributing to its relevance and success.

SFU will work in partnership to maximize our institutional capacities to enhance the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities both locally and globally. We will build respectful and mutually beneficial community relationships.

SFU will meet the lifelong learning needs of students, alumni and the community, and will respond with innovative programs and learning opportunities.

SFU will be BC's public square for information, discussions and debate on key public issues, and will be known as the institution to which the community comes to facilitate dialogue and seek solutions.

#### **Selected Objectives:**

- Make accessible and leverage institutional, educational and research resources wherever possible to promote social, environmental, cultural and economic betterment.
- Continue to build on our partnerships with municipalities and other organizations to play a major role in community building and regional economic development.
- Build strong, mutual and meaningful relationships with our alumni.
- Provide life-long learning opportunities to the communities we serve, especially to our alumni.
- Use our commitment to athletics and recent entry as the first Canadian university in the NCAA to enhance both the sense of community within SFU and our relationships with alumni and the community at large.

## OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

**Intellectual and Academic Freedom:** SFU is an open and inclusive university whose foundation is intellectual and academic freedom.

**Supportive Work Environment:** SFU recognizes, respects and values the essential contribution made by faculty and staff, and will seek to build and sustain a work environment that is equitable, supportive, rewarding and enjoyable.

**Diversity:** SFU will foster a culture of tolerance and mutual respect that celebrates the diversity and the multi-ethnic character of our student body, faculty, staff, and our society.

**Respect for Aboriginal Peoples and Culture:** SFU will honour the history, culture and presence of Aboriginal peoples. The university will welcome and nurture Aboriginal students and will seek opportunities for greater representation of Aboriginal peoples amongst its faculty and staff.

**Internationalization:** SFU will promote international knowledge, understanding and engagement, seeking to engender an active global citizenship among its students, faculty and staff, and to ensure that the institution itself is an engaged partner and contributor on the international stage.

**Sustainability:** SFU will pursue ecological, social and economic sustainability, through its programs and operations. Through teaching and learning, research and community engagement, SFU will seek and share solutions. In its own operations, it will develop and model best practices, from minimizing its ecological footprint, to maximizing its social health and economic strength.

## PROPOSED TAGLINE:

**ENGAGING WITH THE WORLD**

or **STUDENT-CENTRED, RESEARCH-DRIVEN, COMMUNITY-ENGAGED**

In 2006, SFU adopted "Thinking of the World" as a tagline – as a means of encouraging everyone within the SFU community of communities to lift their gaze – to act with an eye to the larger context and to always reach out, across the street and around the globe, in a way that is both inclusive and adventurous.

Building on the success of that campaign, it has been proposed that SFU take the next step by declaring that SFU has gone beyond thinking and is "Engaging with the World".

Alternatively, it has been suggested that the summary of SFU's strengths – "Student-centred, Research-driven, Community-engaged" – which gained resonance during the **envision>SFU** process, be considered as a tagline.